

## DEDICATION

Black and White For Yvette with love.

I am grey, inside, she said,  
She in the black and white dress,  
When I complimented her,  
I have always been grey.  
Black and white is me, she said,  
Outside. Inside I am grey and know  
That nothing's as good as it seems  
And nothing's as bad.

Yet I have seen her trail her hair  
In the stream of woe.  
I have seen her huddled against  
The bridge of her life to come.  
I have heard her blare the tubas  
Of courage against the drag  
Of the endless black of the night  
Of her despair.

I have seen her too, lift the white  
Plaques of her gaiety,  
Angle them to the light  
Reflecting laughter.  
I have taken from her  
The white china of sympathy,  
And caught the shining silk  
Of her enthusiasm.

Perhaps inside her lurks  
Her recorded mother  
Saying, Pick your mind up  
Off the floor dear;  
Stop bawling and kicking  
The polished table;  
Saying, Don't get over-excited,  
It will only end in tears.

But we do not see the grey  
She balances on.  
For us she flaunts the flags  
And we weep with her or laugh.  
She wears black and white  
With an audacious air  
And we pay her compliments  
On how well the colours suit her.

Gillian Stone

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YVETTE STONE

# HALF A BIOGRAPHY

## Introduction

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Started  
mid-1976

### Introduction

Why write my biography? The idea came to me slowly over the years and has taken firm root now that I am 55, separated from my husband. The thought that in years to come my grandchildren, if no one else, might be interested in their Israeli grandmother also contributed. I got encouragement from reading the autobiography of my friend Judith Roberts' mother. She was no accomplished writer, yet I read her stuff avidly from beginning to end and was never bored. I shall try and write naturally, though inevitably some 'composition' will creep in from time to time.

Another reason why I feel I should like to put my early life down is that my memory of very early days, as is common amongst ageing people, is getting clearer and more vivid. In fact I find it hard to remember events of recent years but early memories are getting ~~more~~ clearer, as do smells. *Smells*

A further point to remember: you can go on adding to your biography: It's like a bottomless pit and you keep remembering events. When you think you have neatly finished a chapter you discover there is a lot more to be added: hence the fragmentary nature of the writing.

On re-reading what I have written so far, I find my writing dull and boring, a dead-end catalogue of happenings, humourless. I obviously can't write, yet write I must, compulsively, obsessively, and I find myself waking up in the middle of the night, rushing to the typewriter to put down this or that.

## Childhood

I was born in Jerusalem on 13 December 1920 (the Jewish calendar taught me that I was born during the Festival of Light - Hanukka). My first recollections are a jumble of camera shots: my brother Yacov (Yankel or Yankale - according to gradation of age and affection) 14 months my junior, standing at the ornamental wrought iron railings - rusty with neglect but originally painted black - of our main <sup>pair of</sup> windows in the old quarter of Ahva, Jerusalem, eating heads of matches and spitting the stalks on to a no-man's land of cowsheds and backyards. Other moments: my finding a bit of brass lavatory chain, thinking it very pretty and wearing it round my neck as a necklace; Yacov and I having a violent quarrel and him leaving a black-and-blue bite mark on my left arm which I showed off for a long time afterwards; eating bits of 'kuzbeh' (carob cake) which was meant for cow consumption with great relish - no doubt I should find it revolting now. Jack (Yacov) and me standing on The Parents' bed (two single beds joined together but referred to as 'the bed') throwing ourselves - on washdays when beds were unmade - headlong on the billowing old-fashioned eiderdowns ('perinehs') and pretending to drown; repeating this dozens of times shrieking with 'joie de vivre' until checked by a harassed and busy Ima, who was darting two and fro her arms filled with fresh-smelling sheets and pillow-cases. Under 'the bed' the enormous 'pailah' (copper washbasin) had pride of place. Renneh the washerwoman came every few weeks to squat on her haunches and do a day's washing, but before the trip to Great-Aunt Babel was necessary in order to 'consult the barometer' for the weather - in winter only of course. During the long summer months none of this consultation was necessary. The perinehs were the forerunners of today's duvets, though much heavier, and are not to be confused with 'coldrehs' - coverlets from Ladino-speaking countries; I believe they call them colchas in Ladino but everything had to be Yiddified. Palestine was a hotch-potch of customs, social habits, manners, mealtimes, and I lived in the days of the pressure cooker.

We moved from that house to Shimonovitz's house where Aliza my only sister was born three and a quarter years after Yacov and four and a half years after me. There were no asphalted roads and the architectural style and design were minimal, as were the amenities. Again, it depended what country you came from, so that until this very day there are Spanish-villa style houses <sup>side-by-side</sup> ~~side-by-side~~ <sup>alongside</sup> Polish ghetto-style ones.

X I was so innocent until shortly before my menstruation, and sexual stirrings did not start until I was 14 (and then with a vengeance), so I suppose I must be deemed a late developer. I went with a girl called Margalit to Horshat Schneller for a walk one Saturday; Margalit was a knowing girl, although only a year older. She suddenly tugged at me saying: look at this couple. At a distance under a pine tree there appeared a boy and girl who, to my mind were fighting and writhing, but also, curiously, happy not shouting. I could not understand. She coily explained 'they are making a baby'. I thought about it a lot, but nobody had told me about the facts of life, ~~and~~ indeed, I had not yet discovered sex.

Caked soil was our playground. Horshat Schneller (the Schneller wood) was our only green field. Olive trees with cypress windbreaks and some lovely smelling pines. I still prefer buying the pungent pine-smelling - though much chemicalized - detergent and air-purifiers than, say, lavender or rose-scented ones which have no association with my youth. But we were not allowed to explore in the wood. It was highly dangerous, because Arab shepherds drove their flocks of destructive goats, and as there is no twilight in the Mediterranean, the danger was more than real. Attacks were not unknown and frequently the shepherd boys would expose themselves to the children. I was always very curious to watch but to this day - I suppose because I was never allowed to get too near - all I remember is a billowing mass of white underwear, as against the underwear worn by my father and brother, straight and clinging. To Horshat Schneller we were occasionally taken on special 'medurot' (bonfire) evenings. And what a treat! Young Haluzim (pioneers) sat around the fire singing, wistfully, songs like "Volga, Volga", "the Prisoner's song" - Russian tunes to Hebrew words. Then improptu they would get up and dance horras (boys and girls together!) round the dying fire.

The caked earth in front of our house was where we played fivestones, hopscotch and the games I still see being played everywhere in the world. These games we played out of doors for what seemed every day but must have been only ten months of the warm year.

The house in which I was born was owned by 'Tevieh der milchiker' and his wife Temeh (Tamar?), who sold the milk (watered - I believe) in a large 3-gallon pail with a two-okia measure (about a litre) which served as a fitted lid. I can still see the gesture - rather as though he was looping the loop - which made the milk froth. Even then I was never attracted to drinking milk. In fact I ~~still~~ have an aversion to it. I can still smell the smell of unboiled milk on Teviah's hands - great big beefy hands, and the mixed smell of milk and some other substance which I could never define, perhaps the sweat of his beefy hands - often made me want to be sick. The only form I tolerate milk in the raw is mixed with porridge or corn flakes. I especially loathed and am still disgusted by skin on boiled milk. And many is the time I <sup>Myself</sup> brought up because some well-meaning aunt served me cocoa made with boiled milk which she then stirred with a spoon. Ima knew far better!

Ima, a great hypochondriac about the health of her children, though rather neglectful of her own (in her seventies she had two emergency operations which left her with one third of <sup>a</sup> her stomach - yet she still survives fairly healthily) was for ever fussing around with bits of food

and drink: "eat a little bananaleh", an eppaleh"; drink a little téaleh (diminutive were used for food, especially fruit, to tempt us). Children did die of malnutrition and lack of hygiene. We were never allowed unboiled water from the tap. It was always kept in bottles (not even in earthenware jars because then it would get too cold and might give us a tummy ache, God forbid). It tasted horrid, lukewarm and smoky. We were also overclothed and overcosseted and not allowed to sweat and not allowed to stand in a draft and our life was made a misery if it was discovered we were not 'warm enough' for then very irritating coarse woolly jumpers were put on us and suffocated us. I was dying to tear off layers and layers of vests, sweaters, woollies, but Ima watched us like a hawk.

Jack and I loved being taken to the Old City of Jerusalem on a Saturday afternoon - or was it Sunday? Surely it was Sunday, the lay days of a Festival such as Succoth or Pessach would allow Abba to have a Sunday free. Otherwise it would have meant 'hilul Shabbat' (desecration of the Sabbath) and I cannot conceive of a more sincerely devout (froom) person than Ima, a fervent believer in Judaism and all the minutiae, and a healthy ignoror of all the enemies of the Jews, Arabs or Christians, but chiefly Arabs, of course, since we lived through many pogroms in the 1920s and 30s. "Goys don't count in life" she would state, "except those who are good to the Jews: they will enter heaven". Therefore in the panoply entering heaven would be Emperor Franz-Josef who was "good to the Jews", Galsworthy who wrote the novel where the Jewish hero, first suspected, is then honourably found guiltless, George Elliot, the writer of Daniel Deronda, and one or two or even three other 'lovers of Jews', whose names I forget.

Another of Ima's frequent sayings was "all cobblers go bare foot", referring to the fact that, though she had a father who was a builder, and a husband who sold dinner sets, she never owned a flat nor boasted a dinner set.

The chief attraction in the old city was the Jerusalem police brass band. I still love bands of any sort, a "salvation army" band makes me stop washing up and rushing out of the front door to listen to it. My brother Jack not only adored being taken to listen to the band but improvised his own music, with upturned chambers which he used as drums and broken combs which he played, the spittle helping the tune. He was musical and had a sweet voice, a direct inheritance from Ima who sang a very sweet contralto and played the mandoline. *I inherited the mandoline ability but not, alas, the voice*

We had a scratchy phonograph and an odd assortment of records of which we never tired. The music from the "Teddy Bears Tea Party", some arias from Tosca and Rigoletto (we tried hard to mime the words and got as far as "Tosca occhio nero" - which we confused with a rather exaggerated Yiddish rendering of the word okiah (half a kilogramme). We called the recitative 'kaleboutchkeh' the Yiddish onomatopoeic equivalent of 'hotchpotch'. We also had a record by the famous Yossaleh Rosenblat the hazan (cantor). I made a fool of myself asking *my grand father* whether he was a man or a woman.

During one pogrom - the one of 1929 I think - Aba's cousin Zalman was killed in Hebron. Hebron was a seat of holy learning and young men from 'good homes' found themselves studying the Torah and Mishna as 'yeshiva bakhurim', returning to Jerusalem or Jaffa (Tel Aviv was still embryonic) for some Sabbath days but all Holy Days. Zalman married and lived in Hebron with his wife Shifrah. I believe he was what is known as a 'professional son-in-law', someone whose parents-in-law support for years while the bokher studies in a yeshiva until such time as the children - and there were always many - became too costly whereupon the same father-in-law would take them into his business. But if the youngster proved to be a genius, a 'talmid chacham' par excellence, or better still, a rabbi, then the financial encouragement continued.

The story is told of how Zalman threw himself over Shifrah's body to protect her from being knifed. (An Arab sheikh had lured a number of Jewish lads and wives to his house, promising them shelter: "nothing, nothing will happen to you in my house". But he promptly set the assassins on them and Zalman was knifed to death but Shifrah, who was left for dead under his body, was saved.

The old city of Jerusalem - until it was taken over by the Arabs in 1946 and put out of bounds to Jews - was a daunting place to be taken to when young - a mixture of fascination, fear and repellent smells overwhelmed me and I used to hang on tight to Ima or Aba for fear of getting lost. If we were taken to the Wailing Wall, it was mostly to pray on very Holy Days (Hol Hamoed), but since it was a great distance from Zichron Moshe or Ahva quarters, about 3-4 miles I would say, we very rarely walked there. Aba would hire a garry driven by an 'barabanjji' and we would watch the poor horses rumps being whipped and made to go faster, fart and defecate, almost under our noses. Aba would go up and offer a prayer (mi sheberakh) for us all - paying either before or after the service.

In later years we were taken there from school on organized, cultural occasions connected with history lessons. It was all very methodical: we learnt about the two Temples, their destruction, the Wall (Homa) the Tower of David, Absalom's Tomb. Only in passing and as historical pinpoints were we taught about the Christian Yeshua the Nazarene and his holy landmarks: Gethsemane, Via Dolorosa. The Golden and Silver-domed Moslem mosques were also historical lessons and we only saw them from afar or on pictures, the whole concept remaining very unreal: there were good reasons for this: Jews were not allowed in the Moslem places of worship. Also, one had to remember that Christian missionaries (Catholic, Protestant, how was I to know the difference?) were always on the prowl eager to convert every Jew and sometimes succeeding in converting a few. There was a group of Sephardim who would



stealthily slink into a German church on a busy ordinary Sunday, dressed in Sabbath clothes, but they were held in ridicule by the rest of the community.

I love-hated the smells of the Old City. Arab smells I still find repulsive, the very strong spices like kamun made me feel as though I was eating barth. Great carcasses of red sheep meat were hanging in open Arab butchery bazaars, sickly sweet cakes, overdeet and smelling of a pungent butter made of goatsmilk, all that I found revolting. Also, there were nearly always open smelly drains being repaired in the narrow tortuous streets. Vendors of a coca-cola like drink called 'souss' rattled their enormous copper-shiny burdens on their backs shouting "Tamar Hindi" 'Tamar Hindi' and "Owa'ha, Owa'ha - make way, make way, to make you scuttle.

When I visited the Old City after the re-occupation in the 1970s, I was so seized with emotion that I broke into uncontrollable sobs - on first beholding the Kotel. I would never have believed this could happen to me.

A memory of a pogrom - this one in 1932: a girl at school belonging to the Yafet family, with a slightly deformed mouth and a large cicatrice in the shape of a sickle moon on the right side of her face (no plastic surgery yet, and I doubt whether her family would have afforded it). She was a victim of the Motza pogroms where the rest of her family perished.

One Friday evening I was going to Grandfather's house (I sometimes was allowed to go ahead of the rest of the family because I was the eldest) and I saw a Sephardi with a 4-gallon petrol can and a walking stick, walking fast and brandishing the stick: "They've started, the uncircumcized, the bastards: you see this petrol can? Over their heads with it and I myself shall light the match!" I hurried to Grandpa's house in terror, my first encounter with real vulnerable terror, stumbling over the uneven, unmade-up earth road.

It occupied me a lot, imaging and re-living a pogrom: a revolver shot seemed more acceptable to me: your killer stands away from you and somehow the would is not so tearing sharp, but a thrust of a knife in your body, the spurting of blood and the tearing of flesh gave me many nightmares.

Once Ima caught an Arab burglar red-handed in the Shimonovitz's house: she'd been asked to see that all was well in Mrs. Shimonovitz's house while the household were at synagogue, and there was this great hulking man in his flowing robes jumping out of the window. She started shouting "Ganav" "ganav" at the top of her voice. Something stuck in her throat and she remained lock-jawed for many years. But he was caught: I remember a large gathering of people leading him off, a policeman and especially the shrill whistle of the policeman.

barbed wire

It must have been 1934. 'Disturbances' curfews and ~~barbed~~ were quite common, as a childone went about the daily business without thinking of it as anything special. One day I was walking to school, the commercial course, and near Mahneh Yehuda police station a policeman came running up to me saying, hey you, come into the station for a moment. The first reaction is panic, but he immediately explained: I want you to frisk an Arab who we suspect is carrying ~~bezsz~~ ammunition. I had to frisk a very fat and bulging woman of about 40 (she then appeared very ancient) and the sensation was not a bit pleasant. She cursed and shouted. I could find nothing spiky or bulging. But it was quite an unnerving experience.

One highlight was being allowed to visit Aba's shop in Meah Shearim and sometimes being allowed to touch some of the dainty china. Aba, <sup>whom I adored</sup> ~~who was a~~ <sup>depressive</sup> was left the shop by his mother, savta Haya Esther, Bobbeh Haya Esther, who lived to be nearly ninety, surviving Grandpa Yakov whom I never knew and many daughters, Aba's sisters, who <sup>all</sup> died of cancer. Aba was a poor businessman and Ima and he quarrelled frequently over it and much else. My parents led an unhappy married life and when things were really bad and I couldn't stand their rows, I remember begging them to "please, please <sup>please</sup> get a divorce!", as though a divorce was a magic wand they could both wave and become peaceful ever after. Yet they never separated, and knowing something about marriage, their kind of life must have suited them, because Ima was definitely the domineering party, but Aba would have been even more miserable had he had to play the domineering role.

Coming home from school, I waited to hear Aba's return from the shop: he wanted to kiss Ima. But she always resisted. Hardly ever a smile for him, and poor Aba looking furtively to see what mood she was in. Even when she was in a fairly good mood during the day, she put on a serious, sour face in the evening to greet him. Why? Jack and I hated it and suffered miserably from this atmosphere. I think I suffered more.

One morning I asked Jack "Did you hear Aba torturing Ima in the middle of the night?" They were making love. She would follow him reluctantly from the one large bedroom we all occupied into the only other room, the 'salon'. To this day I don't know whether she ever enjoyed love-making or did she only give in? She probably did some time because I mistook her moans for cries of agony and needing help. Jack always slept through it. ~~THE~~ Psychologists will have an interpretation for it, but I was much disturbed by it all simply not understanding what was going on between them in the salon.

During the biggest quarrel they ever had, Aba saw red and called her "antisemite, antisemite, false coin, false coin". The words still ring in my ears. Aba, a gentle creature who usually garbled his words and spoke fast, <sup>this time</sup> spitting them out slowly, measuredly, raising his voice to a bellowing crescendo. Yet he never lifted a finger to strike her and certainly never us. Ima never smacked our faces, but only our bottoms, maintaining that it is 'bad for the health'. Nevertheless, she got us to do as we were bidden by bawling at us for what seemed all day long.

Once Aba went to Egypt and brought back, amongst a lot of kitchenware and crockery and samples, a dear little miniature ~~teaset~~ <sup>teaset</sup>: white fluted porcelain with a golden rim consisting of teapot, sugar-bowl and milk-jug and three minute cups

and saucers. How I loved the set! I <sup>possessed</sup> had it for a long time and all the bits broke one by one, but the sugar-bowl remained intact for a long time, only losing the lid, and I used it as a salt cellar well into my married life

One or two other little toys Aba brought from his travels I cherished for a long time, a little gilt jewellery coffer with shocking pink upholstery where I kept my few bits - no doubt the lavatory chain too. But poor Aba was a bad businessman, and this was a constant bone of contention between the parents. He worked hard and long hours, but was quite obviously unsuited for the petty haggling, bartering and split-penny profit-making which you had to go in for. Although this was kept hushed up, I do believe he nearly went bankrupt and Saba (grandfather) had to bail him out. Even between Purim and Pessach, when people mostly bought new crockery, his extraordinarily long hours did not always yield the profits he <sup>was the owner of</sup> waited for in the previous eleven months to carry him over the rest of the year. For a start, there was quite a bit of shoplifting and we as children had to go and take turns in 'guarding' the shop and seeing that no Kurdim or Ajjamins ever put saucepans etc. under their voluminous shawls. Also, he employed 2-3 staff who, according to Ima, helped themselves to the primitive till. Ima always said to Aba: your staff are better off than yourself" which I believe was true. If only Ima had taken over, I do think she would have been a better manager, but the thought of leaving the children to be brought up by other people simply never entered her calculations. The parents' constant arguments about 'the shop' - it seemed to me there was never another subject of conversation - coloured the whole of my childhood and had a <sup>most</sup> depressing effect on it.

← X Once when Brian and I went in search of petrol in Brighton, I saw in a garage, with a shock of vivid recognition, the wooden steps which led from Aba's shop to his loft, where some of his stock was kept. It gave me a real jolt, and I had to watch those steps for a very long time and almost eat them up.

Mother was born a Cohen, Shoshana (Reisl) Cohen, and quite early on we became aware of the kudos and yihuss attached to being a Priest. The Levys poured water on the priests' hands when they washed before entering the Holy of Holies in the Temple, we must not forget that. They (the Cohanim) were the aristocracy. A cohen was not allowed to marry a divorcee and only Cohanim could divide their fingers in the shape of a 'V' - rather like a cloven hoof - because this is how they stood and prayed in the synagogue with the prayer shawls over their heads, forming a tent for the little ones

L I was about twelve when I saw my first (and indeed as it happens my only) car accident. Her name was Sol. Very few cars half a century ago, but nevertheless she managed to be run over by one. What I saw of her were bits of leg etc. Her overcoat covered her up, but not completely. Quite a lot of flies, but not a lot of blood. Sol would have been about 10 and in my school, but I never knew her.

(mostly Saba's flock of grandchildren) to 'come up' to them on the rostrum. I was very proud and loved the sound of Saba's sing-song responses on a Saturday morning on the rostrum.

Ima was never elegantly dressed. She had her everyday clothes and a couple of Sabbath and Holy Day outfits. Ima had good legs (though I never heard her talk about them) and beautiful hair - again never drawing attention to it. Children cannot 'tell' if their parents are attractive or young looking, taking them so much for granted. But I was told by various friends and members of the family that Ima was considered a most attractive young girl, vivacious, gay, warm and friendly. I was constantly surprised to think that this description fitted my own taken-for-granted and missed-for-every-moment-she-was-out-of-sight mum. Ah well!

Fashions had gone to short skirts (just at the knee) when I became aware of them, though all my great-aunts and grandmothers and indeed any woman over fifty still wore long skirts. Most probably women thought themselves middle-aged or elderly by then. Ima never wore make-up and I never succeeded, though begging her endlessly, to wear lipstick. I believe she did occasionally just powder her nose. In my own middle-years I tend to be like her and consider that she was absolutely right, though at the time I was livid with frustration that she never looked like the other got-up mums.

Cottons (nothing like the non-creasing ones of today) artificial silk - and for High Days and Holy Days shantungs and real silks). ~~Hardly any really~~ ~~material~~. For winter <sup>(short season)</sup> you wore thick, itchy, irritating long-sleeved vests and the ubiquitous 'svetters' over your cotton dresses. A common costume for the young was a 'Russian' embroidered blouse and a 'sarafan': pinafore dress.

Once my dream came true and my aunt Leah outgrew her sarafan of pale green blouse and darker olive-green pinafore dress and it was handed down to me in the bundle of 'reach-me-downs' to which I eagerly used to look forward. I was ecstatic with joy! It mattered not a jot that it was a trifle too baggy and too long. I soon filled it out.

One occasion when my aunt Tsipora (Feiga - Aba's youngest sister) came to visit Saba's family. In the course of rather formal, stilted conversation she mentioned that a dressmaker was finishing a frock for her. "What fashion is it?" asked Leah and the reply came: "What fashion can you have these days? 'halutzke' of course! (Halutzke was the feminine of Halutz - pioneer - and applied to collarless, round-necked dresses with gathered waist and gathered short sleeves, dirndl, and in the case of Feige, naturally, long sleeves).

As a young adolescent I became aware of clothes, but rather 'safely' in other words, the world of real fashion was closed to me. ~~But~~ But the clothes I did wear were safe. The clothes I dreamt about were quite fantastic, and I doubt whether I would have worn them had I been able to afford them. There was a Mrs. Kachalski who sold my mother clothes by instalments'. Later on her son became President of Israel: Katsir

I was very naive because as soon as Feige left I remember feeling greatly puzzled and hurt because Leah and Alteh her mother (Sabba's second wife - <sup>my</sup> ~~step grand mother~~ <sup>house mother</sup>) burst into mocking laughter: "Halutzke what else?!" I gathered without asking stupid questions that they were mocking Feige's ignorance of at least a dozen other fashions she could have chosen, such as plissé, scottish (on the cross) or even plain straight.

Sabba's second wife Alteh kept a spotless and spacious house, and Saba sported a real office, with the first Hebrew typewriter. In the evening lots of workers came to see him, to be paid, to complain and to take orders. No trade unions and overtime pay <sup>existed</sup> at the time, and Saba was very much the boss, respected by a handful of faithful workers, but beginning to have trouble with young ones who wanted hourly pay, holiday pay and all the things I could not yet understand but listened avidly to. Saba's house always had 4-5 rooms as well as kitchen and bathroom. He, too, changed houses frequently, probably sampling his own ware so to speak. In the house next to the Slonims, his office (probably through Alteh's exhortations) was on a different floor and separate from the dwelling, so that she didn't have the personal supervision of muddy footprints. Saba's house was always airy and smelt of clean bedclothes and 'Bergamot', snuff which Saba took. Delicious. Alteh was extraordinarily mean. If ever she gave me a cake, or a biscuit (more often half a piece of cake), she would repeat her endless questioning of "was it good" for what seemed a whole week. If we ate there on Holy Days it was - I realized later on - all paid for by Ima who bought the fish and chicken and cooked in in our house and the whole caboodle went over to Saba's house. As was evident, Ima worshipped Saba and nothing was too much trouble for her as far as he (or for that matter his) was concerned. Ima was the devoted slave - which we came to realize in later years. If Sabba was ever ill, which he began to be in middle-years, Ima would immediately pale at the news and offer prayers and ~~go~~ run and see if she could be of any help. Which she was nearly always.

Aunts Leah and Aliza (Alteh's daughters) had a room to themselves and Leah, who was very artistic, was allowed to decorate it in the way she chose: she embroidered anti-macassars and painted flowers in oil on artificial silk curtains. I loved her taste and am still very much impressed by the way she arranges her interior in Ramat Gan. Mordechai and Ariele, Alteh's sons, had a room to themselves, but by contrast it was stark and contained a lot of Mordechai's holy books. He was an assiduous student of the Law and later on became a rabbi - the apple of Sabba's eyes.

Leben and kfir, as well as lean cream cheese formed part of our dull diet. All shades of white and thoroughly tasteless, except for kfir (sour milk) which had a kick in it. Leben (yoghurt) was never fruity, just plain ~~xxx~~ bland and dull...

took

Once a year we ~~had~~ a trip to 'Kever Rachel' (Rachel's tomb) between Jerusalem and Hebron. Another shrine around which countless prayers were offered, (Dearest Mother Rachel, you who knows a mother's heart, please intercede with the Almighty for my children and let them enjoy longlife, health, wealth and happiness....)

\* countless tapers lit, countless beggars making a pretty penny through reciting a prayer...

Monish and Zalman were two madmen who visited Jerusalem between Purim and Pessach. They camped on the same grounds, i.e. roughly between the Abva Synagogue and our house. They lit camp fires nearly every night, laughed and talked ceaselessly and deloused themselves, much to the delight and interest of the children, including Jack and myself. By the time Aliza was born they were no longer to be seen. Had they been rounded up and put in an asylum?

and ferociously

The cat-collector ruthlessly/rounded up the yowling strays; they were all strays, nobody ever adopted cats. I can still see a sack or two on a cart stifled moans and the sack looking alive with the fighting animals inside. Whatever happened to them? Were they humanely killed? No one ever asked or cared. Palestine was not a land where cruelty to animals was considered seriously. I was petrified of cats, and until quite late, even if after 'courting' would turn up at midnight or later, I had to wake my poor father who would stumble down to lead me upstairs, out of cats' harm's way. I know now that they weren't interesting in biting me, only fighting and mating, but I couldn't ~~but~~ be within a yard of one. Later on, when Miri <sup>daughter</sup> adopted a cat, I managed to overcome my horror of the species and grew quite fond of Susi. In fact I was the only one who cared for her towards the end, everyone else having lost interest.

When we lived in Teme's house and I was 10 or 11, I saw the next door neighbours, a young couple (though they weren't young to me) a bowl of bloody liquid at their unconcerned feet, ~~embracing~~ <sup>embracing</sup> tenderly. I found out later that she had just had an abortion (I didn't quite understand the process), but they were so "in love" that there they stood, she still in her bloody nightshift and he with his yeshiva bokher beard and peyot embracing lovingly, gazing long into each other eyes and murmuring words. I have never seen a love scene like this in my whole life.

In the flat the yeshiva bokher once showed me what I thought was a papier mache house, beautifully constructed and painted. But 'No', he assured me 'this is made out of bread by my friend who was sent to Siberia'. I never found out why his friend was sent there,

## Chapter 2

### Family

Great grandmother Sarah Cohen (Saba Eliahu's mother) was known as Sarah the Brisker - from Brisk in Lithuania (Litta). She came in a small sailing boat which took her several months on a rough Black Sea from Odessa, then skirting Turkey in the early or mid-1800. She was bespoke to Greatgrandfather Mordechai the Cohen at the age of twelve or thirteen, and the story goes that they were so innocent, they sat on the floor after the engagement ceremony playing fivestones. He was a Yeshiva bokher (what else?). Sarah was widowed rather early, and lived to be about ninety. When she died I was still living in the Shimonovitz house and I remember Ima bringing in a coarse bit of soap one day for our weekly wash in the <sup>copper</sup>/paila which we used for the Big Wash. It wasn't even a Friday, the customary day for our weekly blanket wash, but she washed our legs as far as she could reach without undressing us (for fear of catching cold, God Forbid!). All the while she washed us she prayed "So that my beloved children should live to be their great-grandmother's age. The soap with which greatgrandmother washed should bring the same luck to my children" or words to that effect. Longevity of that nature was quite rare. Superstition which never availed. Poor brother Yacov never saw his fortieth birthday.

Sarah became a prosperous businesswoman. There is to this very day a clutch of buildings in my beloved Mea-Shearim quarter known as "Sarah di Brisker's haiser". She not only had a haberdashery shop, but owned a small vineyard where she personally inspected the feet of the Arabs who trod the grapes for wine-making. "Sit Sarah" - Madam Sarah - also attended as midwife the wives of the then Mufti of Jerusalem and painted his children's throats with a mixture of iodine and glycerine. She was respected by Arabs and Jews alike.

I'm afraid I only remember her as an incontinent little old lady, nutcracker chin, toothless, bedridden, smelly, bedridden who, every time I visited her (she was living with one or other of her two widowed daughters, Greataunt Hanneh or Greataunt Menneh in a tiny 'zimmer': she had to be reminded who I was: "This is Chevedke or Chevedl, Meisl's eldest.

Once my aunt Leah took me to see her during Purim. I was wearing my favourite dressing-up costume in the shape of a rose: lots and lots of pink petals in still buckram to form the skirt, a green bodice with brown embroidery to denote the bed and a tight-fitting green hood with draker green leafy embroidery was the stalk, complete with stiff little wire bit protruding. A rose upside-down.

I had been given too many sweetmeats. During Purim you had home-made cakes and sweets of all kinds. You exchanged gifts with your neighbours and family. The fare was laid on a tray and covered with an embroidered tray-cloth. The custom of Mishloah Manot meant that the children acted as messengers and were given tips in the shape of cakes etc. in every house they visited. To go back to the day I visited Bobbe Soreh (Greataunt Sarah). I became violently sick in the middle of the cobbled street outside her house. Aunt Leah (ten years my senior) quite naturally became very displeased. I think she also feared Ima's wrath. Where normally I would be cosseted and rushed to a doctor by Ima to see if there was, God forbid, anything wrong with me, Aunt Leah treated me differently and I couldn't understand her cross behaviour.

I grew up in the days when Hebrew was becoming 'fashionable', revived and spoken in the streets - instead of just prayed in in the synagogues. The famous language reformer Ben Yehuda popularized and secularized the language which had a different sound when spoken in everyday parlance. The 'havara' (pronunciation) was definitely sephardi and therefore more quickly mastered by the sephardim than the ashkenazim. But I don't remember any difficulties. When we came to live in the Shimonovitz house having left the Ahva abode, I was first sent to kindergarten, and had a very poor time. I was full of anxiety: being sent to an exclusively Hebrew-speaking 'gan', when Hebrew was only slowly and reluctantly being adopted by most religious ashkenazim naturally filled me with fear. "I know," I said to Ima "I know what I'll do, I'll speak in 'patakhim'! (the patakh sound, the vowel sound of a as in Anna was to my ear the sound most prevalent in Hebrew, whereas Yiddish had a lot of o sounds for the same words as in Otto. But children are very adaptable. But to my great sorrow I am in the process of forgetting Yiddish. Not entirely, for I understand and speak it quite fluently, but some vocabulary is missing. We spoke Yiddish in the Litvak pronunciation and always held in ridicule the many other pronunciations of Yiddish, such as Polish or Galician, or Rumanian. As children, we playfully imitated all versions and became adept at them. Much to our parents furtive delight. Somehow, they were less delighted with our success at imitating the Sephardi (Ladino) pronunciation, with its heavily accented khs and eyns and rolled 'r's<sub>g</sub>. Yet Sephardi Hebrew is considered very *comme il faut* nowadays, and broadcasting and TV candidates in Israel must be able to announce in a Sephardi havara when they apply for jobs. They sound so convincing on the wireless that when during one of my last visits I asked my nephew Cobi whether this havara was native to them, he said "don't be silly - they switch it off when they leave the studio". Well, well.



I don't remember the actual move to Shimonovitz house, but I suppose it was a step-up from our first one, and in any case it was nearer Saba Eliahu's house. Although we had the same number of rooms, the traditional salon, bedroom and kitchen, Ima did not have to cross a yard to her kitchen. We also had a bathroom, although the lavatory was still shared and was situated in the basement. In the courtyard we had a well (bor) which periodically had to be cleaned out. Agile Arabs were hired and hauled down with a rope to do the cleaning of the grey, smelly, muddy deposits which they then took away in cartloads.

I remember the furniture: the salon had a bamboo-cane rigid sofa (canapeh) with six chairs to match: they were all arranged like soldiers round the walls. Then there was the sideboard (buffet) beautifully carved oak. Alas this beautiful piece, as well as the bamboo furniture all went in exchange for modern hideous pieces. There were two bookshelves which held the books, mostly holy, but some on Zionism were beginning to appear. Also novels, mostly translations, but some original writings, especially by the famous Shalom Aleikhem, Bialik, Mendeleh Mokher Sforim, Avraham Mapu, Shalom Ash, and naturally the pop writings of Tidhar who specialized in sipurei balashim (detective stories) which my father loved. Mother was the classicist. In the middle of the room, surrounded by ordinary chairs, was the big every-day table which was never tidy. I mustn't forget the <sup>rocking chair,</sup> gramophone, and of course the two what-nots and two first-world-war copper shells which held ~~XXXXXXXX~~ dried grass. Anti-macassars abounded, and Aliza and I had the dusting of it every Friday. I never enjoyed going over the bamboo with a rag dipped in kerosene, puffing up of Ima's embroidered cushions, though I soon acquired a taste for scrubbing stone floors happily and occasionally saving Ima the few shillings she had to pay out to a Friday 'Ozeret'. Ima had a great knack for original embroidery, knitting and crochet. She had an unerring sense of colours. During my last visit to Israel I saw some of her handicraft which is exquisitely artistic. I think I must have inherited her sense of colour. She had just made a couple of bedside rugs for Dinah. They cost her next to nothing because the base was an old brown army blanket, but the applique and crochet work embossed on them was faultless.

Mrs. Shimonovitz's part of the house naturally saw many improvements: her bathroom had running hot and cold water, there was a marble sink and shower, marble began to appear in her kitchen.

Kerosene lamps were then used, so were primus cookers as well as wick stoves for long slow simmering. Aba sold all these things in his shop and the demand for glass hoods was continuous. Aliza and I had to help drying the hoods when they were washed once a week on a Friday. Ima did the trimming of the wicks. Ima used a charcoal iron for her monthly ironing sessions. Sometimes she hired help because of Aba's shantung summer suits.

Aliza was born in the Shimonovitz house. I was  $4\frac{1}{2}$  and when the time came someone took me to Shulamit Futerman's house. Shulamit was then my best friend, we played together and had a few communal toys which we called the 'shutaf' (cooperative). It consisted of tiny dolls for which Shulamit (who was a year older) made exquisite dresses. We also had small empty scent bottles, some silk handkerchiefs. We kept all these treasures in empty chocolate boxes, and the chief pleasure was derived - after the sewing of the dresses - from just taking them in and out of their boxes and looking at them, and if ~~they~~ we felt generous allowing other people to look at them.

I couldn't understand why I was made to wear my Sabbath dress on a weekday, on the day of Aliza's birth. This was a sky-blue pleated skirt and a hand-embroidered top with tiny pink and red flowers, green dots for leaves. I thought it very pretty, though itchy on the thighs. Later on I was taken back to my house where there was a quorum (minian) praying, then somebody took me by the hand and led me to Ima's bed: what was Ima doing in bed, was she ill, I thought anxiously. Lots of white linen. Then someone pointed at a little bundle beside Ima. All very incomprehensible. Nobody had prepared me. But the most urgent ~~as~~ need for me then was to pee because I was very bad at going to other people's lavatories and held my bladder for the 7-8 hours at the Futerman's house.

We were overfed as children. I had fights with Ima about finishing this or that dish. Mind you, I think that in the name of good health and hygiene Ima contrived to overcook the meals. Also in the same name not enough salt was used. I often envied my friends at school who ate raw cucumber, thick underdone pitta and falaffel, marbel (shoeleather), and ice cream. Nobody ever died of these foods. I remember saying to Ima once that I suddenly fancied a fried egg. She immediately dropped everything and ran to the kitchen to fry my egg. It was not to my liking, the while was still transparent and made me feel sick. When her back was turned I quietly shovelled it into the small patch of front-garden, where nothing actually grew.

There was a most amiable man called Fischl the Apteiker - the pharmacist - who lived in the Bokharan quarter and who used to paint our frequent sore throats with the ubiquitous mixture of glycerine and iodine. We were not meant to swallow the mixture but invariably did and it felt good. Later on we were allowed to visit him on our own. We sat on benches waiting our turn. His wife was spotless and the stones and windows in her house were like mirrors. He was one of the many men who always pinched my cheek, but whereas I resented and objected to this cruel gesture by other men, I tolerated his pinches.

Women somehow never pinched your cheeks but only spoke 'nicely' to one, using many diminutives. One soon grew to differentiate the genuine from the false ones. Poor Fischl died quite young (mid or late forties I think). One morning I told Ima my dream: "Guess what I dreamt last night? I dreamt that Fischl died". Ima chastised me and said "Pu, pu pu (by way of spitting and warding off the evil of the utterance) don't open the devil's mouth". But that afternoon we heard that he died during the night, during my dream. (Am I psychic? definitely not!). Funeral announcements were made by a town-cryer at any time of day, he gave name, address and time of funeral as well as starting point. Later on hasty posters announced such events. The point is that you must bury the dead quickly and especially in a holy city as Jerusalem is no body is tolerated to remain unburied say during the Sabbath if the person died on the eve. When Yacov died on a Friday and the grieving was hardly begun, his wife's brothers, in the name of the Torah, hastened his burial much too quickly to my poor Ima's mind. Ima never lived Yacov's death down.

Later on we went to live in Mrs. Fisher's house. She was an old American widow<sup>1</sup>, prosperous, covered in white floury powder and rouge and lipstick, very artificial and unsuitable. She spoke American with a heavy Polish accent and she pretended to adore us children. But we could see through her. Somehow none of the family felt happy there - Ima was very sensitive to atmosphere - and I think we only lasted a year until it was time to do a 'mukhareem' again: a move named after the month of 'mukhareem' in Islam, the traditional month for moving. While still in Mrs. Fisher's house I planted a tomato tree in the bit of caked-up earth which passed for a garden (garden is a euphemism for all the bare patches in front of houses, only occasionally did some house-proud owner actually sport some geraniums etc. This tomato plant, believe it or not, actually came up! I never waited for the cluster to ripen but ate it in great relish out of Ima's sight (in case of tummy ache, you see, because of unripeness!). It was in Mrs. Fisher's house that we started the ritual of evening prayers, a version of "God bless Mummy and Daddy". "God bless all the Jews in the dispersion, but not sonei Israel (haters of Jews), Eli Frankel (Aba's competitor who had a hardware store and did better than Aba) and later on, yes, dare I say it, except for Mrs. Fisher.... but this latter sentence was whispered in case Mrs. F. was on the other side of the thin dividing wall listening...

There were always period of drought and the water-cart was a frequent sight. We were not allowed to cart the heavy buckets: there was always an Arab boy, and later on, a Yemenite, thin, small, wiry. (I once saw a Yemenite man carry a piano on his back). The water served as drinking water (boiled of course), for bathing and for cleaning the floors: from the bath we ran a hosepipe for lavatory-flushing and stone-floor washing purposes. Not a

drop was wasted. Not only was water scarce but it was metered and expensive. Clean water which 'made kosher' the meat and chicken was saved up and poured over the geraniums, with magnificent results. It wasn't until the first serious drought year in England, when people were exhorted to conserve water, that my thrifty water habits paid dividends.

But water shortage did not mean that there were not the periodic floods; I remember one winter looking out of the Shimonovitz window (school was out of the question) to see, not only a flood of beige-coloured water streaming towards the gutter, but a group of people standing in their goloshes earnestly peering into the gutter: it seems a little bundle, later identified as a few-hours old baby, was blocking the gutter and was soon removed. I begged Ima to let me see it, but by the time I got there in my goloshes, the bundle had been removed. I was terribly disappointed. I couldn't stop worrying about the baby for a long time, asking Ima all sorts of questions and getting most unsatisfactory answers. Where was the baby's mummy, did she know her baby was dead? etc. etc. As I remembered the incident periodically I came to confuse it in my mind with the blonde Hungarian woman who later on lived in the ground floor room in the Abrahams house and whose husband was said to be away working in the Dead Sea salt and mineral mines. She had a baby - also blonde - but obviously no husband. Was it her first baby found in the gutter?

Shopping for the Sabbath was always done on a Thursday afternoon, and because Shuk Mahne Yehuda was nearer, Ima soon gave up carting baskets from Meah Shearim. Ice-chests were becoming common, and woe betide a Sabbath eve when the iceman failed to come. As we grew bigger, Ima had to have help with the carting of the straw baskets and a Yemenite lad would help her. Later on we were able to go with her and help her cart the loads. Beautiful, large red tomatoes, tiny cucumbers, spring onions, potatoes, fresh fish still oozing blood and more often than not a live chicken or two to be slaughtered ritually by the shokhet. I often had the chore of taking the chicken to be slaughtered: the swift blessing the even swifter blade over the exposed neck, a few wriggles and hey presto, most humane, and I never squirmed. All the beautiful raw material in the shape of fresh vegetables, aubergines and ladies' fingers, salad and meat, never, somehow tasted good, because Ima would overcook and undersalt.

Doctors were a regular fixture in our young lives. I am now convinced that they came far too frequently, that we went to visit them equally too much, and that they ran away with most of Ima's money. But Ima always panicked if we gave ~~xx~~ so much as a sneeze or coughed out of place. "Oh my God, they're ill" and off we went to the doctor, or himself was summoned if we ran a tiny temperature. Three

doctors stand out: Dr. Israelite, Dr. Shabetai and Dr. Neuman, Ima juggling between them according to who she thought was good for what particular ailment. I am quite sure we would have recovered without them. Nevertheless it was Dr. Israelite who discovered the excessive white corpuscles in Jack's - Yacov's - bloodstream at the age of 39). Yacov died of leukemia, mercifully within ten days of the first discovery, though at the time we all thought we would go crazy with grief and outrage - and me so far away in England - there are tears in my eyes everytime I remember his death). But now of course, if we dare to admit it, we are grateful for his quick rather than lingering death. Ironically, had Jack lived only ten years later, he might have survived for far longer as they are discovering antidotes for leukemia.

To go back to the doctors, they were all trained in Russia, and it was believed in Palestine that Russian medicine was more efficacious than the later more fashionable German medicine practised by doctors who fled the holocaust in the mid-thirties.

Dr. Israelite was my favourite. Very earnest and conscientious. Drs. Shavetai and Neuman (pronounced Naiman) were undoubtedly what I then felt and what I now know to have been rogues, and I certainly didn't enjoy Dr. Naiman kissing and touching me when nobody was looking. Dr. Shavetai was supposed to have asked for payment in advance and for trying out samples of medicine on his guinea-pig of patients. My mother minced no words with him: "I do not allow you to make guinea-pigs of my children, use the safe and tried-out medicines, please". I think he was slightly afraid of her though they were the same age.

Apart from those and the famous paediatrician Dr. Kagan, one of the first women doctors whom we somehow never cultivated, we had the equally famous Dr. Ticho whom fortunately we needed to visit only very seldom. He was the eye specialist and always smelled of methylated spirits which was the disinfectant in those days. He was very popular and a great expert on Middle Eastern eye diseases, especially trachoma. His surgery, spotless and busy with starched nurses, always had a sprinkling of Arab children suffering from eye diseases: I could tell before I saw them that they were Arab. They had a specific smell (not unclean) which I find hard to describe, and can no longer smell nowadays even when I visit the old city. It seems to have emanated from their skin, because, of course, they came to his surgery washed and dressed in clean clothes. They also had a special kind of haircut: even if it wasn't a home-chop it was 'different', and of course coming into the Jewish part of Jerusalem they wore 'European' clothes. I swear I had no Arab prejudice and no hatred which I began to feel - temporarily albeit - later on. I will wager that a child knows no colour or race prejudices: in kindergarten I had to look again and again at photographs in order to be convinced that such and such a friend had indeed a brown skin and was a halabi or yemenite....

Once in Shimonovitz house we experienced an earthquake. I remember Ima rushing in from the kitchen into the large sunny bedroom where Jack and myself played and where Aliza was asleep in her cot. Ima snatched the baby from the cot, got hold of Jack's and my hands in her free hand and began running terror-struck and panicky and howling. Since she howled we also howled and the baby howled and we all ran swaying to this side and that: the sensation was rather like when a child spins: when they stand still the whole world rocks. We heard the distant rumbling, like 'barood'. When out in the street, where there were dozens of people, we stood helpless, simply not knowing what to do. Quite a bit of damage occurred in several houses, though not hours. And later we learnt that the boy two doors away, a tall and lanky lad who always wore a Baden-Powell Scout hat, was killed as the room collapsed on him.

"Barood" fascinated us: building was going on at a tremendous pace and all the hard chalk rocks, beautiful white tinged with pink, had to be blown up by dynamite. Later it was worked into rectangles by armies of labourers sitting cross-legged with chisel and hammer fashioning the 'bricks'. The dynamite was ignited by one workman, warning was given 'barood!' 'barood!' and all scuttled and fled and hit behind safe rocks. Then the explosion sounded and all returned safely to the damaged rock. Children too were then allowed to approach the rock. But sometimes the explosion failed or there were echoing mini-explosions. That was always great fun as the sense of danger was heightened.

The fashion had begun to change for little boys: no longer did they appear in yarmelkes but proper hats were encouraged. Yacov wore a cloth 'tembel' hat in the summer and a 'casquette' in winter. When we were taken to the photographs every few years Aba still had his Stetson on but Jack was allowed to wear his yarmelke right back so it did not have to appear in the photograph. Aliza and I appear very solemn, unsmiling, while Ima, in her short-hit-wasted brown silk dress, beige shoes and head-hugging felt hat seems to be suppressing a smile, or is quite simply 'posing'.

Shoeleather was the sweetmeat I adored - that an Halva. Though shoeleather (marbell as we called it) was my favourite. A concoction of dried-in-the sun apricots with some sugar added and kneaded into a flat piece of leather. It lasted for hours, you just went on licking at it.

On cold winter days we were allowed to drink 'sahlab' from the sahlab vendor outside school - an arrowroot drink with sugar and nutmeg or cinnamon drunk hot. Of course one's tastebuds were so delightfully poignant then. I still very much enjoy tasty food, but last year when I tasted Sahlab in Jerusalem it did-not-taste-the-same.

The food we were definitely not allowed to eat was 'falafel' because it was considered too 'indigestible'. All highly spiced chickpea mixtures were said by Ima to cause bad tummies. Humus and turmus were thus equally excluded. But very occasionally, we used to swap our bland, hygienic cream cheese sandwiches for pita and falafel for a handful of turmus, wet, slimy, soury corn-on-the-cob like peas, and some mouthfuls of humus. Ashkenazi children nearly always brought gvinah raza sandwiches (cottage cheese) while the lucky sphardi children boasted pita and falafel and its concomitants.

I loved being sent to the shops for Ima. The weekend shopping was done on a Thursday, but daily shopping was done from the corner shop, and well I remember the lovely slices of Halva being backed off an enormous mound and wrapped in brown paper. Salt and sugar were measured into blue-paper cones, which Abbeh the shopkeeper twisted himself. But I specially liked buying oil, olive or sesame, for which I brought our own bottle: Abbeh would funnel golden liquid from his gallon tin, and the oil-bubbles fascinated me.

Har Hatzofim (Mount Scopus) how exciting it was to be taken there by the parents. Soon after the Hebrew University was first established there, we took a trip to the pinewoods and the amphitheatre on which we saw Brachah Tsifra the Yemenite singer. She was dressed, in one of her parts, as a middle-aged Yemenite praying and dancing - with only his feet gently - while the hands were held skew-whiff in front of the ecstatic smiling face. I think the song was 'Hamavdil' the havdalah which is recited at the departing of the Sabbath, but I'm not sure. We also saw Rina Nikiva's dancing troupe. But Bracha Tsifra's beatific smile is what I remember.

When I was taken to my first performance of real live theatre, it was the ~~theatre~~ Hadibbuk with ~~Hana Rubine~~. Her song 'Hinach Yafah Raayati' sung in a man's deep alto is something that still sends shivers in me.

My next performance - and what an event - to have seen two performances two years running, was the Threepenny Opera, and JennY8s song of the Boat Pirates was memorable. Later, my friend Haya Akinin got the record, and we played it again and again. How did the Akinins live so neatly, so spotlessly in one room with three daughters. And Mrs. Akinin was always so sweet and kind to me. Incredible.

Family - continued

Aba had one or two songs which he would sing in his deep base voice, "Seu Ziona Ness Vadegel" and "El Rosh Hahar", slightly unrhythmically - again disdain from Ima: "What's all the hurry? You want to get to the end of your song quickly?" She was a good contralto. She played the mandoline sweetly. I inherited the ability to play that instrument and later on my children - most of them - became musicians. Very early on they discarded music and played by ear (like me) except methodical Oren who has taught himself the flute and the saxophone.

It was the height of our joy to sit and listen to Aba's stories about his escape from the Turkish army. We must have heard them dozens of times and never tired of them: Aba was of serving age when the War broke out (World War I) and since Palestine was under the Turks, they roamed the country seizing lads of around his age. First his mother (grandmother Haye Esther) hid Aba in the big water jar (tanajah), then in the wardrobe, but no tricks availed: he was caught and sent to Anatolia. The great saga concerns his escape (yes, he who could never hurt a fly!). And as children we avidly drank in the spinned out story of his long train journey, his secret pact with two other Jerusalemites - under the very eyes of the guards - when to risk jumping off, the Mediterranean sea on <sup>one side</sup> ~~the other~~, and the wide, bare plateau on the other, with soldiers posted at intervals. They did jump (climax of the story, and our hairs bristled every time we heard it) - with very ~~aw~~ few bruises. Then started their long roaming in Anatolia, their trudging at night and hiding in the day, their beards growing lice, their filthy bodies in tattered clothes, begging for stale bread and water from the peasants. I shall never know, nor did they I think, how long it took them to reach Syria, but reach it they did and the second highlight of the story came with Aba's first sight of Rosh Pinah on the Palestinian border, and his falling on the ground to kiss the holy earth of Eretz Israel! The sequel to the story I heard from Uncle Naftali - Aba's youngest brother - when I was last in Israel in 1975 just before Naftali's death. Naftali, nearing seventy and ailing died of cancer a few weeks later. We visited him and his wife Tsivia. Naftali reminisced about his young days and told us two things: one was the death of his father (grandfather Yekev - Yacob. He'd caught pneumonia at the age of barely 40, but survived the "crisis" and was making good progress. He asked for his hat and coat as he felt like going out. He got dressed and as he stood up - Naftali remembers him big and towering in his hat and coat - he suddenly collapsed like a scarecrow and that was that. The other story was when Naftali, a small boy recovering from a childish cold and sore throat, was given lemon tea late at night by his sisters.



"If you promise to get well by morning, there will be a lovely surprise for you!" The surprise turned out to be his only beloved brother - Aharon Zelig, my Aba, straight from Rosh Pina. What joy in the family!

I must talk about the intense religious feelings of the family. That they were able to remain, almost all of them on both sides, very 'froum' (devout) to this day is an achievement which speaks volumes for their unshakable belief. It simply never occurred to them to deviate, to doubt, or to step one jot or tittle outside the letter of the law. Judaism was their love, their spiritual prop, their cultural and everyday heritage, indeed their *raison d'être*, to be cherished and cosseted and held up high. Indeed they were proud to be Jews and the minutiae were unquestionably followed, never regarded as a chore, a nuisance. Was not Judaism the spiritual drive that helped us through the unceasing trouble persecutions? Was not this cultural and religious tradition the only reason for our survival? I came to think differently, later on, alas! X

The daily bread was nearly always earned by the women in the family until Ima's generation. They ran the small businesses while their husbands sat in the Yeshivahs studying the law. Thus grandmother Haye Esther, as indeed great grandmother Sarah the Brisker on Ima's side, were acute businesswomen, while their husbands, whom I never knew, were the men of learning, had lilywhite hands, never soiled by petty mundane transactions.

Cancer killed off quite a number of Aba's sisters. The eldest, Merke (Miriam) died before the age of forty, having left a string of children to be brought up by the eldest daughter; later Aunt Sarah (Aba's sister) was to die of it and later on Sheineh, the only sister I never met. Sheineh was her name and her photographs showed a really beautiful girl. She emigrated to America with her husband Zalman and he died of cancer too. I gathered that theirs was indeed a stormy love life. It was rumoured that she poured lysol over his face in one of their quarrels meaning to disfigure him and partly did so.

Aba came home in the middle of the day (very unusual for him) and told mother of the telegraph received in Meah Shearim (no telephone in those days) and they both burst into tears crying like children, and quite naturally we children followed suit. Sheineh must have been in her middle thirties. Grandmother Haye Esther bravely survived the death of a young husband and saw the death of many of her daughters, and yet she clung to life in her late eighties and early nineties, though bedridden, not allowing her daughter Tzipheh (with whom she ended her days) to leave her for a few moments. "Where are you off to", when are you coming back?" she kept asking anxiously and in panic every time Tzipheh left the room.

X  
So if I tore some toffee paper by mistake on the Sabbath, or ripped a piece of toilet paper off the roll (they normally got pre-ripped on Friday afternoon) I felt genuinely guilty and came running to Ima with confessions. She was very good and comforting and exonerating me because of my tender age! Once I dropped Aba's Tefillin by mistake and felt near death, remembering that you had to fast for a whole year if you committed such a sin. But Ima again was there with the comforting assertion that I was only a child and it will not be held against me.

I cannot quite describe my feelings for Grandmother Haya Esther: I never felt close or comfortable with her, probably because I felt she censured Ima for not bringing us up 'froum' enough, i.e. we were allowed to wear short sleeves in the summer, short socks and our hair was bobbed instead of plaited. She thought Ima was not only 'free' but treated Aba badly, not nursing him enough during his Sunday-morningitis attacks. There is no doubt Aba needed psychiatric treatment, but nobody thought of it at the time.

Grandfather Eliahu (Eleh) Ima's father was a tall figure of a man whom I worshipped and adored. He had tremendous character and was held in great respect and awe (especially the latter) by those who came in contact with him, starting from his second wife downwards. It is difficult to imagine him having married at 19, fathering three children by grandmother Yocheved. She died in childbirth with her fourth who also died. He must have been all of 26 when he found himself a widower. It was customary then to marry the nearest relative to the deceased wife, the theory being (and it was proved wrong here) that someone in the family would be a better stepmother to the orphans. So he married grandmother Devorah (Alteh), Yocheved's sister who was then about 16. Alteh at 16-17 and Ima at the age of six had to look after the two young babies, Uncle Nathan then 4 and Uncle Joseph (now in the States) a very young baby. Ima never spoke badly of Alteh. Ima never spoke badly of Alteh. The longer I live the more I respect and admire Ima. We now realize that Alteh tended to exploit Ima. But what else? Herself a mother of four pretty quickly what was she to do? So of course she spoilt her own children and neglected her dead sister's brood.

Grandfather Eleh had to struggle to keep such a large family and in World War I he left for Alexandria and earned a precarious living by hawking little watch-chains and bootlaces to soldiers.

Saba Eleh nearly always wore a light suit, milky chocolate in colour, and for Saturdays he had a similar outfit but made of shantung. Once a year on Yom Kippur he wore white from top to toe. On Kol Nidre night, after the meal which was to last for 24 hours, Saba would make his way to synagogue with his troupe of sons (reinforced by Aba who always came a little later as he had a shop to shut). They wore their 'talissim' over their white clothes and made very little noise for they wore white plimsolls. They worshipped in the same synagogue. Yom Kippur was odd because as the family gathered in Saba's house after the service, there was no watershed in the shape of a festive meal, no table laid with two khalot covered in white cloth, no wine and goblet for kiddush, only the candles burning in solitude.

The festive Sabbath meal invariably consisted of gefilte fish, soup with kneidlach, and chicken or red meat with beans and potatoes. The dessert was nearly always stewed prunes. Then lemon-tea to finish. I think Ima's (and nearly all devout housewives) life was focused on the Sabbath meal traditionally eaten on Friday night. Starting from Sunday, one began to plan next week's shopping and cooking. Candles came much later in fashion, for I remember when tradition required the blessing of the housewife to be pronounced over two wicks dipped in olive oil. Ima nearly always prayed in tears. Gutter Got, loz mir nit onkumen tsu meine kinder's tsdkeh: Dear God do not let me fall a burden on my children's charity. Obviously meaning her old age - a fact which I now heartily echo.

To the fast on Yom Kippur we were introduced gradually, so that by the time we were 12 or 13 we fasted the whole of the 24 hours. I remember once being shocked by my aunt Aliza who was always eating sweets, slinking away to the lavatory one Yom Kippur to gobble some sweets. I could not understand her insincerity.

During the Saturday meal Zmirot were sung in Saba's house. Because he had more sons than daughters, male voices predominated. Yom ze mechubad mikol hayamin ki bo shavat tsur olamin. "This is the most honoured day of days, for during it rested the rock of nations". It always intrigued me that some Zmirot contained the deed you were not allowed to perform on a Saturday, but you were allowed to matchmake your children...

Ima loved her father more than anyone in the world. We felt it. We noticed this fierce love of hers by the way she worried herself almost sick if he took ill. He was to die a long and torturous death of cancer at the age of 67. Ima lived through that agony. I doubt whether she ever really loved poor Aba as she loved her father and her children. However, in Ima's late middle years (I suppose because she had no father and the children were all independent) she lived peacefully with Aba at long last. Just before Aba died she asked for his forgiveness, and he asked for hers. They both forgave each other. Aliza was there. It was not emotional but a very intense experience for both of them. ✕

Grandfather sported an office with what was surely the first Hebrew typewriter in Jerusalem! He also had an English one. And several other gadgets such as hole puncher, paste and headed paper which I loved (and was occasionally <sup>allowed to</sup> when he concluded a profitable deal) to play with. I must have got the taste for office work early on in life through Saba's office.

My two families - the Cohens and Valenskys didn't exactly get on, though I rather think the rivalry was more on the grounds of 'froumkeit' than economic. Grandfather Eliahu worked his way up as a prosperous building contractor. He left Meah Shearim, established himself in Zichron Moshe in a house with four rooms, kitchen and bathroom - most spacious for those days. The Valenskys remained living in Meah Shearim (Who wanted to leave this religious quarter to go and mix with the 'freiers'?) Although I suspect that deep down Ima respected most of her husband's family, she showed customary disdain for them. Now in her old age she is on very good terms with them all, especially Tsipeh whom she visits in Meah Shearim. We were never much encouraged as children to go visiting relatives in Meah Shearim though I remember Aba frequently begging Ima to be allowed to take the children to see his family on a Saturday. Sometimes they came to visit us, and I seemed to detect a kind of artificial best behaviour. Ima seemed to be acting haughtily with them, completely out of character. I do believe she couldn't help herself. Nowadays Ima exhorts us to go visiting the very same relations.

When I come to think of it, it is strange how friends as such hardly existed. One never went to dinner with friends. Outings only occurred within the family, and dinners to be eaten out of family context were only those connected with family 'happinesses' such as weddings, bar-mitzvahs, circumcision, engagement and such like ceremonies.

Synagogue was not forced on Aliza and myself because (a) we were too young and (b) we were female. <sup>(Blessed he who made me as he wished)</sup> "Baruch sheasani kirtzono" contrasted badly with Baruch shelo asani isha (Who did not create me a female)! Food for liberated women, OK. Nevertheless as I have always noticed, the mother of a family carried most of the weight in a true religious set-up.

I remember a synagogue incident: One Yom Kippur (we always went for Kol Nidre) I badly wanted to go to the lavatory and Ima who took these things seriously as the beadle's wife for the lavatory key. But I must have spent quite a long time there, a queue was forming and soon I was to incur the wrath of the wife of the Shamesh (beadle), a veritable hag who came to the loo door and banged on it with all her might. I was almost too terrified to move, and when I came out she kicked me. I thought Ima would take my side but somehow because of the Holiness and ge of the evening, Ima soothed me down and did not lash out at the Shamesh's wife as she would, no doubt whatsoever, have done on any other occasion.

X  
Dr. Theodore Herzl died when Ima was still a young schoolgirl. She came home in tears. 'What's the matter? Saba asked, 'why are you crying?' And as is typical in Yiddish, every question is answered by another question: 'Why shouldn't I cry, since Dr. Ferzl is dead?' (Get it? Dr. Fart?)

I loved Meah Shearim, though as I said before I was not greatly encouraged to go there. I loved the smells, the hustle and bustle, the cries of vendors, the haggling and the whole buoyant atmosphere. I particularly admired the unfussy way in which all my numerous cousins were growing up: no coddle-moddling by my aunts. No worrying lest they ate an unwashed apple, lest they wore one sweater too few and so on.

I loved "sahlab" a hot arrowroot drink sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar and, curiously enough, this was one item of drink Ima did not object to us buying at school. In fact gave us some milim for it, but not, God Forbid, for any other cold drink. Woe to us if we spent the money on falafel, humus or turmus, which were all supposed to give us diarrhoea. Falafel has caught on nowadays and we can get it in packets in delicatessen shops: you simply mix the powder with water, shape into balls and fry. But the stuff we got half a century ago from street-vendors needed the complete grinding of the chickpeas, the mixing with 'schoog' and other fiery peppery substances, and the frying over a charcoal fire. I still love the whole family of pulses and chickpeas. The slithery 'turmus' grains were dishd out of salty water, and the pleasure of popping them out of their thin shells into one's mouth was indescribable. Humus, on the other hand, was always dry, rather like the 'kadámés' which were brought home on Friday afternoons, still warm, to be eaten along with other 'garinim': the pips of melons, water melons and pumpkins (dried and roasted) all throughout the peaceful Sabbath. I think sweets for children are an acquired taste, because as children we got much more pleasure out of all the piquant, salty nibbles, though there was one kind of sweet which we adored: the strawberry-coloured sugary-souery boiled sweet which we loved to retain in our mouth for as long as possible before finally chomping them.

Ima's second brother was Uncle Nathan. Again because he was brought up by stepmother Alteh, who was also his aunt, he felt closest to Ima and was not one of the favourite sons. We were very fond of each other, though he expressed his affection funnily: he narrowed his eyes in a smile, and shook his head in approval when we met. I must have been very young when he married, because I cannot remember his wedding ceremony, as I vividly remember all the rest of the uncles and aunts weddings. Nathan married Shoshana (two Shoshanas, 4 Alizas, 2 Leahs, two Oras in our family). She was lovely to look at, a tactful, kind and spotless person. She always made

me feel good and relaxed and she was an exquisite cook. Later on I discovered that because we were such poor eaters (small wonder with all the food stuffed into us) Ima would surreptitiously take some meat-balls etc over to Shoshana's, make her lie to us pretending it was Aunt Shoshana's cooking and thus make us eat. We ate it all gladly, which proves that suggestion is a powerful weapon which can stoop very low. Nathan and Shoshana had two boys, Avigdor and Alex. I loved them both and still do. I adored having Alex with us for he lived with us for quite a long time when Avigdor was very ill and had to be isolated (again, I suspect it must have been notifiable typhoid). I loved painting Alex's little finger and toe nails with my red nail-polish, and he would come up, sweet little, dear little fellow. aged two, asking me for a renewal of nail polish. His first name for me was Jevedd, and I could have eaten him up with a spoon when he first said it! I still have the same affection for him, although he is a balding (though very handsome) man of forty. Avigdor's wife Aliza is not very "sympathique" and she and Alex's wife Rachel do not speak to each other. They were having babies in the same hospital at the same time, and one refused to use the same sitting-room if the other was present. Poor Shoshana, in her widowhood, feels distress at this state of affairs.

I loved Aunt Shoshana's numerous family, all unneurotic and gay and loving life, unlike my own Ima. Shoshana's family started life (all 9 or 10 of them) in a spotless 2-room apartment in the "Hungarian Quarter" of Jerusalem. The Schwartzstein family were gay and sported a philosophy of life which I envied. They cracked jokes, they danced around, they were all attractive to look at, while of course working very hard for a living. Their telling of jokes and general joie de vivre was frowned upon by my family - perhaps because one always had to moan the destruction of Jerusalem both by the Greeks and by the Romans. Also in my family you were encouraged to worry about something all the time, if it wasn't health it was money, and if not that then antisemitism.

Uncle Nathan was to die of a slow cancer at the age of 54 - and I wasn't even there - in great agony. I named our daughter Miriam after him: Miriam Natanya Emily.

The third offspring of grandmother Yocheved, Ima's second brother, was Joseph. He went to New very early on and I only got to know him on his first visit to Jerusalem. However, we knew about him as Ima hardly stopped talking about him, loving him and praising him. When he came

to Jerusalem bringing Aunt Leah (Lilian) with him I was already twelve. Lil was much younger than Joe, gay and a bit of a tomboy. (Later on when we visited them in Schenectady I realized that she was very much the boss-woman and wore the trousers in Poor Joe's life. They have three daughters, Veda (named after Grandmother Yocheved) Elissa (another Aliza) and Bonnie.

I naturally had no real relationship with Uncle Joe because I had no daily contact with, as I had with Saba Eleh's second lot of children by Alteh: Mordechai, Leah, Ariele and Aliza. Uncle Nathan came in a different category: he was an adult and not a boy or girl barely 9 years older.

I very much enjoyed their company, chiefly because they were not so very much older and yet old enough to advise me, to direct me to cajole me, but never to scold me like Ima. Aunt Leah was the eldest of the brood, only ten years older than me, Mordechai only nine years older, Ariele a bare four years and Aliza my senior by only 3 years. And yet they were all aunts and uncles not brothers and sisters! I was indeed lucky.

The clearest memory I have as a very young girl is Mordechai and Ariele taking it in turns to dress us for the Sabbath. Ima would clean us up (blanket washes chiefly) - baths were reserved for once a month, not once a week, again Ima's hypochondria. Then the fresh underclothes and top Sabbath clothes were laid out and it seems to have been a great joy for those two boys to dress the three small children. Obviously in such a puritan family such as ours, this had to stop as soon as I reached three or so, in other words, a real little girl. We had great protracted fun because I now know that the uncles deliberately started putting things on in the wrong order, or swapping Yacov's clothes with mine, dressing and undressing us. We came to expect all this and would sometimes anticipate by putting on the wrong clothes ourselves first. As we always wore too many clothes, even in summer, the operation took a long time, and Ima hovered in the background, busy blessing the candles and laying the khalla and wine for kiddush, fluttering around us with exhortations not to 'catch cold' but she never stopped the fun. Uncle Ariele loved to come and 'take a rest' in our house on Saturday afternoon. He had thick wavy hair and he wore a not for his 'rest'. But I suspect he liked to come so as to have his rest interrupted by the three of us, especially me, who always nagged him into playing games especially one where he lay flat on the ground holding up his legs and we would perch

on his feet pretending to be zeppelins or aeroplanes and make the appropriate noises.

Leah was the eldest daughter of Saba's second brood. Intelligent, and she considers herself attractive. She is now a widow of 65 and maintains that men fancy her. I don't know. She continued into secondary studies and became a qualified teacher. She joined the Haganna and for years my grandfather never knew about it. But when he discovered where she returned from late one night, he beat her black and blue and the poor girl had to leave. I think this was the only occasion when Saba used corporal punishment, though he had a fiery temper and once or twice I remember him taking his slipper off in a hurry in order to smack one of his children's bottoms.

One must remember the feelings of the Cohens about the political set-up. Never great Zionists, because it contrasted with their religious doctrine, and certainly very anti-halutzim (pioneers - <sup>who were</sup> Godless, <sup>committing</sup> wore very short shorts and went about bare-foot, and the greatest of sins, indubitably, the desecration of the Sabbath), the Hagan was very much associated with alien~~x~~ feelings. The whole course of the Palestinian history was to change course in the middle 1930s, but this is a different chapter. Leah married Ephraim Salant, the great-grandson of the <sup>first</sup> Chief Rabbi of the Ashkenazi Community, and they had two daughters, Ariella and Dafna. (Ariella stayed with us in London for about a year, where she met and married Michael Kisch, son of Brigadier Kish, and it was through his mother Mrs. Kisch that our family got to know Uncle Charlie Waley-Cohen). The story is told about Ephraim great grandfather. When Prince Edward (Victoria's son) cruised the Middle East and arrived in Jerusalem, Rabbi Salant offered to visit him to pay him homage. But the Prince said: Certainly not: I, as a mere head of State, shall come and pay my respects to you, the head of Religion. And so he did, and the family never forgot the honour. Ephraim was a lawyer, a womaniser, who always took me into corners and kissed me.

After Leah comes Mordechai who married Hanna and who was to become a millionaire through her father's business. Though a very mean millionaire. Mordechai was grandfather's favourite. He was a brilliant yeshiva boy and when quite young became a qualified rabbi. By the mere laying of hands, the then Chief Rabbi Kook ordained him. Mordechai also studied law and became a qualified lawyer. His only daughter Ora also became a lawyer. Mordechai



has an even, content and quiet manner.

I never remember any ructions with my young uncles and aunts. We never quarrelled and I honestly don't remember them ever exploiting me. Though they had frequent rows themselves, we as children never suffered.

Arieh came next, not terribly bright, and rather quick-tempered, but with a heart of gold. He eats like a bird, and couldn't hurt a fly. He hardly ever giggled (unlike Leah and Mordechai with whom I had enormously long giggling sessions). Arieh was Saba Eliahu's least favourite son and you knew it. Poor Arieh Mordechai was a golden boy, but not Arieh. Arieh became Grandfather's handyman - and later on it was said that grandfather thwarted him in his future career, keeping him under his thumb as an assistant contractor and paying him meanly. I don't know. I suspect a lot of it is true. Arieh married a bossy American woman called Ida (the second one in the family to marry an American boss) and Arieh and Ida went to live in Chicago. It always surprised me that Arieh (who could not hurt a fly) should become a ritual slaughterer in the States. Arieh reminded me a lot of my own Aba. Morose, quiet and sulky. It appears that though a coward in daily life, Arieh quite distinguished himself in the war of liberation (1946): he volunteered in the capture of the Old City, showing extraordinary bravery and courage in the frontline. I still find it puzzling and can hardly believe this.

My aunt Aliza, the baby of the second brood of Saba's family, was my closest companion, since she was only three years my senior. Not very bright, and certainly not at all academic (rather like Arieh), she barely finished primary school. Later on I was told that the only reason she was kept in a form higher than me was that she was my aunt, but that she really only deserved to be in my form - academically speaking. Bright she may not have been, but the kindest and most equably-tempered also-ran in the family. We went out a lot together, especially as teenagers. And when fraternization with British soldiers during the second world war was not frowned upon, we went to innumerable parties thrown by Jewish families to "befriend" British soldiers. As there were not enough British Jewish soldiers, others were "tolerated".

#### IV

##### More family

Grandfather Eliahu must have been my model paternal figure and I loved, and respected him. Because Ima loved and respected him unconditionally (and her relationship with Saba Eliahu was totally different from her ambiguous relationship with her husband) I echoed her in every way. It was not at all difficult to worship such a tremendously strong, virile character, brimming with personality and poise. Of course he had a temper, but a very rare and controlled one. I also know that I was his favourite granddaughter and since he boasted 17 grandchildren and goodness knows how many great-grandchildren, this was a feather in my cap. I later realized that my aunt Aliza (Alteh's youngest daughter and only three years my senior) and undoubtedly Alteh also were jealous of my being the 'favourite'. It was a treat being allowed to go and see Saba. Whereas he was intolerant and strict with his own children (with the exception perhaps of Mordechai - but Mordechai never put his foot wrong anyway and didn't need to be chastised) he was not so with me. However, I soon learnt when to stop misbehaving and carrying on if his face wore an expression of "Now stop it". He didn't need to look at me twice. Poor Aba could go on until he was red in the face but I continued to cheek him. Poor Aba, it seemed to me, was respected by nobody. "wild goat" (a wilde tsig) was my nickname for a long time. Saba often took me on his little brown donkey when travelling round his various building sites (what a treat it was!), his building-contractor's work blossoming and prospering by the time he was middle-aged. Someone said "what a lovely daughter you have, Mr. Cohen", and he replied proudly "my granddaughter, if you please!"; indeed he was forty odd years my senior, if that.

Grandfather was surrounded by a number of tame Arabs. One family I remember though because we were not allowed to mix with them I only remember them as a seething mass, not individually - lived in one large dark, cool basement under Saba's house sporting innumerable little "uncircumcised ones".  
on the Sabbath  
Salim was Saba's handyman, not only watering the concrete/of the numerous buildings Saba was constructing, looking after the donkey (which slept in the same basement, I think, but also lighting the lamps and especially switching them off late on Friday night - in fact Salim was Saba's Shabbath goy. Later on when fraternising with Arabs became dangerous, nay impossible, and Salim had to leave, Saba boasted an automatic switching on and off device. Where did Salim and his enormous brood go? Who knows?

Saba did not dislike the British and respected the British government. Were not the English the "people of the bible"? (automatically omitting the New Testament). When I began to work for the British government, in my adult years, and would tell Saba all sorts of stories about their culture and mores, he did not poo poo them outright as Ima would do "Goyim, she would say, they don't count") Saba listened carefully and obviously without prejudice.

The Shimonovitz boys were a rough and coarse lot and Shimon Shimonovitz was fond of me, much too fond of me in a sexual way. He would be 16 and I a little girl of 5-6. He would borrow me from Ima to go for walks or whatever, would give me a piggy back and would stroke my legs sensuously. It was not unpleasant. But much later he propositioned me (I was an adolescent and it was my first experience of being propositioned. It came as a complete surprise, and I felt momentarily paralysed, because I had deliberated tried to relegate the Shimon-little-girl-episode to my subconscious. I remember, paralyzed and frightened though I was, walking bravely and resolutely away from him and telling him to go to hell (lech leazazel). My body shook with fright afterwards, not thrill, as was to come in later years, and I avoided him quite a lot after that. The second rather nasty early sexual encounter happened much later when a young stranger accosted me in the dark (no twilight, remember, so that suddenly at 6 o'clock in the evening I was walking in the dark). I would be 18. I cannot remember all he said but he kept on saying "hey, shim'i, shim'i (hey listen, listen), and masturbated ceaselessly, and as I began to run, he ran after me. Panic seized me and I started shouting. I can imagine what it must be like being raped. I suppose I am lucky that I was never raped, though one or two unpleasant sessions in a car where the owner had to extract kisses from me in return for lifts taught me how to differentiate ~~from~~ the sort of people <sup>by whom I would hate</sup> ~~to be kissed~~ or love being kissed.

My poor Aunt Aliza was raped as a child of 13-14. By an 'ami de la maison'. Her sister, Aunt Leah, who was training in the Seminar to be a teacher, was in the habit of borrowing books from a middle-aged man called Shaishon who had a wife and many children and lived across the road from them. Once, Leah sent Aliza with a book and I think that Mr. Shaishon raped Aliza quietly, in an inner room, with the brood of children - and obviously the wife - in the next room. I tried so hard to get the sensation Aliza felt. She said he talked a lovely Hebrew with all the turns of phrases she loved to hear, he talked non-stop and caressed her a lot. He must have aroused her. But the end came too quickly for her because she said "and then he did things I didn't enjoy and didn't want him to do, and suddenly she saw blood all over the sofa, and he asked her to put her knickers on and run home quickly. Aliza told nobody, not even her elder sister and certainly not her mother. She told me the tragedy a little later and I completely switched over from slightly disdaining her and begun to pity and respect.

The Shimonovitz boys were quite good gardeners, probably the only gardeners in Zichron Moshe. The patch at the back was laid out as quite an attractive little garden. Egyptian cotton bushes, snapdragons in profusion, and of course the ubiquitous geraniums. There was no grass, but they laid the beds ~~in~~ ~~zazpatterns~~ and sprinkled pebbles in diamond-shaped patterns. Even the path was gravel-covered and it was strictly symmetrical with ornate vases in correct order. One day the Shimonovitz boys were digging hard when they came across a very new litter of kittens. They murdered the kittens, I think it was Itzhak who did it, by skewing them with his rake. That scene is still haunting me from time to time. I shall never forget it.

We had all the childish ailments possible, and some more. Sore throats galore, which meant we had to lie in bed stifling in thick woolly prickly scarves, but that was not all. Sometimes we had compresses applied to our throats. Was it mustard or just methylated spirit and water. It got unbearably hot and I tugged and tore at the scarf to let in some air. I suffered more from being overhot than cold when a child, and to this day I hate hot weather. At night we would wake, thirsty and dry. Ima had a tripod with a kerosene lamp which burnt all night. There was hot water in a kettle, which she would pour over some essence of tea, with some lemon juice. It was always too hot and I longed for some cool water. Tea was stewed and kept going for a week in a 'chainik' and nobody minded. Apart from tea, soda syphons ( a treat because you see it was too cold!) and real orange juice, we drank quantities of cocoa, because it prevented diarrhoea. Only Ima was allowed coffee. Tea was mostly drunk as a cure for 'tummy ache'. Sometimes we had camomile tea with some fresh mint in it. Also as a 'cure' for tummy ache. I don't think Ima slept much. One or other of the children was always awake with a sore throat - which always appeared a thousand times worse in the night. What a life she had with ailing kids! I don't remember any of my tough, strong children ever giving me much trouble. Merlin kept me awake for a few nights with severe earache, but otherwise they seemed to have none of our complaints. Or rather, we must have been encouraged to complain so that Ima could spring up and worry over us.

We all slept in the one room, all five of us, and how hot it was during the 'hamsin' nights! If, as often happened, we had to have 'ventouses' applied to our backs (father sold them in dozens in his shops) the oven atmosphere was at its peak. Ventouses were funny! The feeling of all those enormous red bumps when at last they were drawn off! But first you were allowed to admire them in the mirror which was taken off the hook and brought to your bed for the occasion. Another vivid memory I have is of Ima bending closely over our potties examining our stools, for worms I suspect, but worse, for blood.

"Slihot"/<sup>(pardons)</sup> was an exciting time between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, when men were summoned early from their beds - about 4 in the morning - and offered their prayers in the synagogue. The prayers incorporated pleas for forgiveness. There was an old beadle who sang the call for prayer so sweetly and melodiously, trudging from street to street, carrying a lantern, that Ima had no hesitation in waking the children to listen to him. She loved the sound of his words, and although we loved the sound too, I think what we mostly loved is to see her ecstatic face registering the pleasure of listening to his chant. She would comment: "Now he is in such and such street", and "now he's crossed the road, to turn the corner into the other street". Once or twice we caught sight of him, a small limping man swinging his lantern: "Get up folk and come to worship God "leavodat haboreh), but it was sung in the Ashkenazi havara and sounded "leavoidas haboire", and some of the urges he spoke in Yiddish.

My parents rarely went out in the evening. I don't think it ever occurred to them. The blissful part of the day for Aba was to get hold of a newspaper, yesterday's paper, the day before, it didn't matter, and "zach tsushparen" and "stretch out" on his side, reading it. The sound of "shah, shah" accompanied by a frothy spittle at the corners of his mouth is what I remember as answers to our inexhaustible questions and Ima, in protest, "Zelig, why don't you answer a child? Are they strangers to you, or what?". One evening, probably the only one in their life, my parents were given tickets for an "Habimah" performance of "hadibuk" starring Hana Robina. I remember kicking up such a fuss that in fact they gave up the idea. I hit and kicked Ima and was completely panic-stricken at the thought of their leaving the house, although one of my uncles was to sit in for us.

I have only a few memories of my kindergarten experience. I rather suspect that I was more frequently absent than present, with sore throats or tummy aches or what have you. Or maybe other children in the gan would have sore throats and tummy aches and Ima feared they would be catching. She dreaded infections. Small wonder. The kindergarten was a house at the bottom of the road - one of the first experiments. It was founded by Hassia Sukeni, mother of Professor Yigal Yadin, the archaeologist-politician. Yigal is 4 years my senior but I well remember him and his brother Yossi at the gan. We sat on little chairs in front of little tables and drew houses and gardens and flowers in primary reds, greens and blues. We were sometimes taken to 'Horshat Schneller' to pick flowers. We sang a lot of songs and danced quite a bit in one big circle. We were given a lot of cocoa to drink. As the cocoa at the gan was made with boiled milk (which I detested) and a skin formed which would make me promptly sick, I was excused cocoa-drinking for the rest of my days at kindergarten.

Gveret Rivka, with an enormous bottom, was my teacher. I can still see her bottom wobbling and I remember that her bottom wobbled at a slower rate than her walk - unrhythmically. She had a son Eliezer, a tall, gangling fellow, who was the apple of her eye. I learnt later that she was a war-widow (First World War) but because she did not know for sure that her husband was indeed dead she could not re-marry, an 'Aguna'.

We also sat on little benches with holes in them so that we could do 'pipi' and even 'caca'. But I was a private performer and could never do caca in public - hardly even pipi.

I don't remember my brother at kindergarten. I think very early on he was probably made to start "Heder" and then went on to finish his studies in the Seminar Mizrahi - the Orthodox Teachers' Training College. Tachkemoni school and Beit Hakerem Seminar were considered too "frei". Aliza went to the same kindergarten but of course at "Beit Sefer Lemel", and besides I doubt if she attended more regularly because of the same blessed childish ailments.

Mrs. Shimonovitz did an awful lot of cooking. Especially, she gutted fish on Friday morning to make a lot of gefilte fish, as well as salmon fritters. Ima also gutted fish, more messily and neurotically than Mrs. Shimonovitz. Mrs. Sh. had a rough time with her husband and was much domineered by him. Indeed I think her sons domineered her too. She always bemoaned the fact that she had no daughters. I didn't like Mr. Shimonovitz who always pinched my cheeks. One day I was taken as Mrs. S's 'chaperone' when she had to be examined by a doctor. I was supposed to 'keep an eye on the doctor', so that he wouldn't mess her about, I suppose, but as I had no clear instructions (I suppose for fear of corrupting me) I really didn't know what my duties were. But I was attracted by the flies on the window-panes and forgot my mission. Later on when I remembered the incident it occurred to me that Mrs. S. a flabby middle-aged woman, most unattractive, could hardly appeal to the doctor, however randy. But there you are, vanity knows no bounds. Cats would sometimes have litters in Mrs. S's wardrobes, and she used to get very impatient with them. She muttered a lot to herself in a whiny, broken, uneven voice.

Once Ima went shopping and Yacov and I rocked ourselves silly in the bamboo cane rocking chair which turned over. We were stuck. We giggled and sobbed for hours, until Mr. S. came to our rescue, pinching my cheeks after the rescue operation, of course.

One day I sprained my ankle and was in the sort of agony I can still vividly remember. Later on the only other agony in my life was my hemorrhoid pains - not, curiously enough my childbirth labours which were always very sharp it is true but remarkably short, and anyway one knew all the time, especially after the first child, that they were only for an hour or two. Not so the twisted ankle. I can still hear Ima's clip-clopping over the cobble-stones in her galetchas (wooden clogs) carrying me in her arms to the house of the Gurgi man with the name ending in Shvili (Hakmishvili, Panicashvili?). He was the bone-setter, and himself looked as though no bone was ever straight in his body. He limped and could never straighten up. However, the miracle was accomplished! In one agonizing twist he had me absolutely right and I didn't even have to limp home! No wonder I believe in bone-setters.

Once my aunt Aliza took me on a round of stealing. We lifted a bar of coarse washing soap from the travelling soap vendor's balancing scales, when his back was turned. He carried soap in the sacks on either side of his donkey. 'Saboon! Saboon! he would hawk. Another vendor had sand to sell, especially for spring cleaning between Purim and Pessach. (A renna, renna, a renna samd!). I don't remember getting any thrill out of stealing. On another occasion we went stealing plants from my own kindergarten nursery. I was then a schoolgirl. Again, I disdained this particular free gift of a small geranium growing out of an empty jam tin.

Our house was never "in order", except for about twelve hours a week: from about 4 on Friday evening, after Esther the spongerke came to wash the floors and Ima dusted and later Aliza and I helping) the furniture. By Sabbath midday it was in the usual disorder. Tables were hardly ever 'laid', except for Friday night dinners and Sabbath lunches - very early lunches as soon as the men returned from Service. Admittedly Ima spent a lot of her youth embroidering Sabbath cloths to cover the two loaves and tray-cloths to put under the Sabbath candlesticks, but in time they all got shabby. Ima was more concerned with carrying out the letter of the law, than with frills. Also keeping the house in order would not give Ima time to worry. Worrying was an occupation per se. If Ima had nothing to worry about she was indeed sad. But especially did she worry about her children's and her father's health. Later on, in spite of determination to the contrary, I too became bored with housework. Yet Ima was fundamentally clean and hygienic. Renneh the washerwoman was our monthly char for a good quarter of a century. She came every fourth Sunday morning, sometimes in the dark at 5 a.m. She disdained stools and simply squatted on her thin haunches, rubbing scrubbing, stirring and boiling, until her hands looked like white tripe.

Ironing day was another day that came not too frequently - not as frequently as washday because although you must sleep in clean sheets, it is not written anywhere that they must be ironed. Ima was an impatient ironer in her young days and do not forget that the iron itself was temperamental, having live charcoal in it. When Ima was middle-aged and looking after Aliza's interest, she most conscientiously ironed every little item in Aliza's house. Occasionally Ima would hire a repasseuse. "Sarah the madwoman". Sarah was a Gurjit and from time to time grew a big belly, and we never knew what became of the babies. Indeed we never knew that she was pregnant, but only remembered later on that that was what she was. We were not encouraged to hang around when she was ironing. I have never seen such exquisite ironing; even sceptical Ima had to concede at the end of the day that it was 'beautifully done'. Sarah liked praise. Sarah would drink boiling lemon-tea without scorching the inside of her mouth and would sometimes handle the charcoal with her fingers rather than use tongs. I still remember her ~~þ~~ scarlet face spitting out, with a farting noise, the water, sprinkler like, over the ironing.

The Eve of Pessach was a terrible time of upheaval and Ima was invariably bad-tempered. Not only was there the usual turning out of cupboards, wardrobes the 'kalchen' (whitewashing) of the rooms, especially the kitchen with tinted whitewash. A man came to do this, who sported only four fingers on one hand (I forget which). He would pour water over the chalk and it would make a hissing noise and sizzle, and then he slowly poured a dark liquid which looked like washing blue and which turned the chalk into a pleasant pale-blue. Later on came the fashion for the "mottle", and the "sayad" who walked his tall ladder like people walk on stilts, would dig a rag in a darker blue or green mixture and lightly roll it up and down the wall. I didn't like the fashion at all, preferring plain walls.

Also on the Even of Pessach, the Pessach "crookery and saucepans" had to be taken out of the loft, scoured and made ready to use during the week of Pessach. Some utensils which were still hametz were allowed by law to be boiled and we had to take parcels of cutlery to the public baths for the man to scald. Some other utensils were quite kosher if treated at home. Ima would sink knives in earth for three days and three nights, after which they were deemed kosher by law. But above all I remember a lot of scouring sand about, and a nitty-gritty feeling everywhere.

Before Yom Kippuring we had this crazy ritual of swinging live hens round our heads, chanting "zot kaparati" etc. "This be my scapegoat". I hated it.



Esther, the Persian floor cleaner always sang in a cracked voice. She had various nieces as helpmates and departed with a blessing: "Hatunah minshan Yocheved, Darmitzva minshan Yaacob". To which my mother always answered devoutly "Amen". Yacov and I would kill ourselves laughing asking her "Esther, inti fortsit", i.e. <sup>are a</sup> ~~do~~ you fart, when in fact we should have asked "Esther inti Parsit?". She never suspected the trick and always answered yes.

While the parents slept on warm Saturday afternoons, Yacov and I loved to sit on the step in the porch and shout at the top of our voices: "Tochess, Pipi, Caca". How brave we were!

As a young girl I suffered from intense bouts of shyness, interspersed with attacks of giggles. Once my uncle Mordechai sent me with a message to some learned friend of his who lived in Romema. How I welcomed this mission! Romema is the first quarter in Jerusalem you pass when you drive from Tel-Aviv, and from Zichron Moshe it took my short legs quite a while to reach. I looked forward to the walk and Took Shulamit Futterman with me. All went well in our half hour walk, but when we knocked on the friend's door, I knew at once that all was lost. The friend himself opened the door, and it makes me burst out into giggles even now - though the laughter is much more metallic and coarser and can't be sustained for long - to remember the confrontation. Suffice it to say that I got nothing out of my mouth except fits of giggles, absolutely nothing, and I returned home ashamed and unfulfilled. It would have been much better for Mordechai to send me with a note. Mordechai himself was also subjected to such giggles, so when I made it clear eventually after an eternity of giggling that I drew blank with the man, Mordechai too joined in the giggling.

The mirpesset (terrace) at the Abrahams' house was an interesting place - one wall was completely made of glass, some stained-glass effects at the top, and the rest in ordinary window-panes. The other extraordinary 'effect' was a painted alcove simulated as a door - goodness knows why. It was accurately painted, complete with perspective effect. The Shama' family ~~was~~ first inhabited the whole of that floor (unlike us who only had half the floor, i.e. one flat, and shared amenities with various successive neighbours, the latest being the Brombergs). The Shamas came from Haleh, but first spent about a quarter century in the Southern States of America. When they emigrated to Jerusalem, well off and with an enormous family they brought with them a very old black lady, a negro slave! She was indeed a freed slave, but was so attached to the family that she couldn't bear to leave them. So they brought her over aged about 90 and she eventually died in Jerusalem. I distinctly remember her.

To go back to the mirpesset: a large box of geraniums which kept flowering practically the year round stood in the recess painted with the false door. Ima used to pour all the 'koshering' bloody water (that is the water in which the chicken, and occasionally the red meat, was soaked after it had been salted, the ritual for making meat fit for human consumption). The geraniums loved it and thrived on it.

The middle of the mirpesset had a table (which Ima still uses in her bed-sitter) covered in the traditional 'sarata' (American oil cloth)

and which for some ~~reason~~ high days and holidays was covered with a chenille cloth. One week, after we returned from our 'fresh air' holiday in Jaffa-Tel-Aviv, we found the chenille had disappeared, and knew immediately who took it: every week a hoard of mendicants descended on the house begging for nedava (alms) and Ima used to give them either some 'milims' or the leftovers of the Sabbath meals. They came in family droves, always shouting "Nedava, nedava, tsedaka, tsedaka, ivarech hashem" Charity charity, God will bless you. Woe betide if they were not satisfied for I swear that they used to curse us under their breath. Ima always gave handsomely to charity, unlike me, I believe she followed the precept of giving a tenth of her income away, and I notice that nearly all her mail in Jerusalem consists of thank you letters from various charitable yeshivahs, hospitals etc.

We had some uneasy, some pleasant relationships with our neighbours who shared the mirpesset with us. Once an old woman lived in the next flat who used to throw fits of madness, and when those fits became directed against Ima, for no reason, she had to be tranquillized and removed into an institution by her children. I can still see Ima standing guiltily while the children kept telling her: Don't worry, it's not your fault, Mother would have turned against anyone. Another time the flat had a couple of young hassidim. She wore a sheitl, but because after ten years of marriage she was still barren, they had to divorce! They loved each other and must have been in their early thirties.

The Brombergs occupied the flat until Ima left to go and live in Rehavia, near Aliza. We got on very well with them and are friendly with Shura to this day. Shura got very fond of Aliza. His wife minded naturally. But she was brave and we kept on very good terms. When Leah, Shura's wife got paralyzed, he would serve her, carrying her down the stairs in his strong arms and generally doing everything for her. Now she is dead and he is forlorn. The Brombergs were great pioneers. Coming from highly cultured homes in Russia, they worked the land in various kibbutzim most of their young lives, the true 'idealists'.

The first telephone appeared in Saba Eliahu's house, as indeed did the first typewriter - Hebrew of course. It is curious to remember how people would shout into the telephone. Also, since we have to gesticulate with both hands, it was quite a handicap for Jews to do so with only one.

The Kamara family, a good dozen of them - emigrated from Haleb and one of the girls Tufaha, was at school with me. Mr. Kamara quickly acquired many properties and was very well off, but the family lived a primitive life: they had two large lofty flats knocked into one, enormous by Israeli standards, but all it contained was the bare minimum: a few humble beds for sleeping in, a few chests for clothes, the ubiquitous hand-woven precious carpet or two, not on the floor, but hanging on the wall, and an oil-cloth covered table in the middle with a few stools. Absolutely stark. No ornaments. Ma Kamara suffered from perpetual migraines, and I have never seen her except dressed in a simple shift with her head swayed in a white head scarf which she kept dipping in a mixture of vinegar and water every now and then. They spoke Arabic. Pa Kamara, a fat-bellied waddling man forever counting his worry beads was prone to squat on his fat haunches in the evenings on the terrace of his flat, no easy chairs, and tell his friends stories. I believe he could just about read his prayers. Grandpa Eliahu would sometimes go to the story-sessions and came back with one which we loved to hear: it concerned a man who, rather like Kamara himself, was squatting on his haunches with a gathering of friends in the desert telling a story of how a man was sitting on his haunches with a gathering of friends..... the crux being that the man told a story about a man who, while telling the story about a diamond, lightly dipped his fingers in the sand while telling it and fished out a real diamond! I remember a cocoa-tin of Dutch origin called 'Betke' which had a girl looking into a mirror seeing a girl looking into a mirror etc. It always set me thinking of the infinity of numbers and prehistory, and what started the world etc. I used to get very tired.

When we lived in the Abrahams' house we were surrounded by most interesting families from different parts of the world - most of them like us second and third generation Sabras, but others were new immigrants who had the sense to leave Europe in the mid-1930s, escaping the holocaust. But one family was not so lucky: they were the cousins of the Praczickis, and I made friends with one of their boys. He said he knew English, and when I engaged him in conversation (I was very proud of my English which I had started at school a couple of years earlier) a curious jumble of words emerged from his lips: it was worse than any German zis-is-my-fazzer kind of stuff. I honestly thought at first it was Polish not English. His family were disillusioned with Palestine and they returned to Poland, and all were wiped out in the ghetto.

For years the Simantov-Levys (a Georgian-Gurdzi household) lived in the bottom part of next-door. They were famous for us for three things: one was their beautiful Georgian carpets which, every Friday morning, were taken out into the street and shaken vigorously by the two elder daughters, very strong creatures. They did it rhythmically, each girl holding the carpet by two corners. Every time the carpet flew up exhuding volumes of dust, the girls exhaled in time with the dust. Secondly, they were very clever and could speak fluent Yiddish and impecable English without ever learning it at school. Thirdly and most importantly, they had shouting matches regular weekly ones and we all thought they were killing each other. I have never (except when my daughter Miriam broke down) ever heard such hysterical screaming. I now believe all the quarrels were about money and parental favouritism. One day I went to the corner shop for a loaf. Some of the Simantov-Levys watched me, they pounced on me demanding the change. I immediately put the few grush in my mouth and as they tried to force my mouth open I must have bitten one boy's fingers and they lay off. They never touched me again. Simha Simantov-Levy was my age but never really my friend, although we went to the same school. It still gives me pleasure to go through individual members of families who were neighbours and who had daughters, friends or otherwise, who were schoolmates. I can't remember the names of the 5 Simantov-Levy boys, but vividly remember their faces.

I was great friends with Shulamit Futterman and once she was allowed to sleep in my house. We were very naughty. We took our knickers off and looked at each other. Sometimes tickled each other's pussies, giggling and shrieking with laughter. Shulamit made exquisite little dolls clothes from scraps of material. She ended an idealist in a kibbutz, marrying very young. She too had numerous brothers and sister, her eldest brother was a deaf-mute, and her parents curiously aloof from their children. They did not enjoy their children's company and Ima used to say that it was unheard of the way they left their kids to fend for themselves and would go off to the cinema (of all places) every Saturday night. Mr. Futterman was a prosperous watchmaker. One of the daughters died in tragic circumstances during one pogrom when a bomb was placed in a taxi in which she happened to ride.

Under the Futtermans house, in the basement, there lived a madwoman, Mattl, who looked like a man. But Ima was frightened of her, never crossed her and was always extra sweet to her. When Ima happened to see her in the street, she would point a furtive 'hamseh' at her - an extended palm of the hand - to ward off the evil eye. But before Mattl came to live there, there was an Aggami family consisting of mother, pregnant daughter and

husband. The pregnant daughter's time duly came, and we could see the whole birth process from our balcony windows. We heard the shrieks of childbirth, and poor Ima was distressed. Eventually the girl died in childbirth. Terrible wailing and tearing of hair followed, and the young husband appeared distraught. But Ima said it won't last long for him only for the old mother, who would grieve for ever. Ima was right, in less than three months the young man was married again.

Across the front door from them - in the basement of the house bang opposite ours - there lived a Yemenite with two legal wives. It was (and perhaps still is) legal for Yemenites to have two wives - maybe because they imitated the Moslem custom, though Jews. How those wives quarrelled when he was at home, and how amicably they lived when he went off every morning to be a porter in the Old City!

Above them was this Ladino widow and her daughter. The widow was fat and worked as a shop assistant in the Old City. She did practically no housework. The daughter would cook and wash and scrub and we could see it all from our balcony window. Their main meal was at night, unlike the Ashkenazi community which took its main meal at about 2 p.m. Their meals always smelt gorgeous. Ratatouille of aubergines, peppers and courgettes, with eggs sitting on top. The daughter would then spread out the washing-up paraphernalia on the floor of the courtyard and made a terrible clanking noise against the washing-up basin, scrubbing <sup>with</sup> lots of rena samit (sand). And she always sang to it. The fat widow, the breadwinner always stretched out her feet on a stool and smoked a hubble-bubble (nargileh). The daughter was not allowed to sing then.

A German intellectual family came to live over the Simantov-Levys house. He was a philosopher. The family were extra polite, both indoors and out. They studied Hebrew seriously and we noticed their gradual improvement. Once they had a cousin to visit them. I became very fond of him and it was reciprocated. We saught each other out, he bending over the rails of his balcony, and I stretching out of one of the windows of the mirpesset. We talked for hours about everything under the sun. But I forget his face and name.

One family downstairs escaped from Poland, and before long they brought over about 10 or twelve members of their family. All living in the cramped 2-room flat downstairs, I don't know how. Never a cross word, always amicable and close, and they worked like Trojans going out to do housework and living on what appeared to have been a constant diet of bread and jam and tea. I envied them.

I never got to know the hierarchy of Aba's family as I knew Ima's, and to this day don't know what aunt came first, except that Aba followed his eldest sister Merke (Miriam) and that Naftali, the only other surviving son, came last. I do know that Aunt Sheineh (the American) preceded Naftali, that's all. All (except Sheineh who died childless) married young, had prolific offspring, were poor, earnest, unpretentious, and as I grow older I realize that most of them were fine and lovable persons. But intimate with them I never was allowed to become, & as for giggling sessions.. these never happened, as Ima did not encourage them (regrettably, she now admits).

They nearly all lived in Mea Shearim, were 'frum' and sincere, but cleanliness and hygiene did not preoccupy them. It must have been desperately difficult to keep clean in the overcrowded, no-running water conditions they nearly all lived in. Aunt Merke died of cancer quite early and we were told that she 'slipped on a banana skin and died'. Her husband was a Hungarian, 'mischiginer frum', always rowing with his mother-in-law, my grandmother Haye Esther. What about? Later on I discovered the reason: he never got every penny of the dowry and 'board and lodging' he was entitled to as a professional son-in-law.... He remarried when (in the words of Bobbe Haye Esther) 'he killed his with with sorrow'. His second marriage did not fare very well, much to Bobbe's delight. Bobbe was not a vindictive person at all but rather sad and resigned. Just think of it, she buried so many young daughters after he husband's death, there was no reason why she should be happy, yet she clung to life and lived a very long life, nursed in the end by Aunt Tsipheh. Tsipheh herself is sad and lonely, a widow, but her brood of daughters take it in turn to look after her. Tsipheh, although mother of so many daughters kicked off with a son, Ben-Zion who early in adolescence became a schizophrenic and is lingering in an institution. During my last visit to Jerusalem I relentlessly cross-examined her about his illness (Ima did not entirely approve) but I had to make sure about family background history of depression, after <sup>my</sup> Miriam's temporary breakdown. I did not gather a lot of information, but two things have stood out, the first was that when he first broke down, (and since I experienced this myself with Miri, and I'm convinced that there is such a thing as suddenly breaking down, though there must be a process leading to it) he had to be taken away and he lived with my Aunt Sarah for almost a year before, obviously, becoming unmanageable. The point is that they knew even then that the closest people to the sick person must be separated from the victim. The second point is that when she goes to visit him (and has done so for the last 40 years), there is always a moment when he shows a flicker of interest in her, but that soon passes over and he reverts to his enigmatic non-caring behaviour once again. As she told us all that she cried bitterly, and of course I followed, remembering my own misery.

Aunt Sarah lived in Petah Tikvah, married to a schoolmaster who then became the headmaster of his religious school. I was allowed to go and stay with them in the 'country' as a young child. How homesick I felt, and how I hated the long journey to the loo at the bottom of a very long and winding green patch (hardly a garden - wild corn was there in abundance). And all those boys and girls, my cousins, surely eight or nine, and a baby at Aunt Sarah's breast. She was very kind to me. I never got to know the names of the younger children. But cousin Yacov - about my own age, were friends, as was cousin Haim. Yacov died of typhoid fever. He couldn't have been more than eleven when he died. I was so shattered, but my parents, and indeed his parents, got over it much quicker than I thought possible. It was the first death of a relative of my own age that I ever experienced, and indeed there had been no other infantile death in the family. I re-established relations with cousins Haim and Shlomo during my last visit. Shlomo has bright-blue eyes, the only one of the siblings. I took up with many more of my cousins during my last visit. Curious how, after half a century, there is that family feeling. It will never rust, though left dormant for fifty years.

But not all who lived in Mea Shearim were father's family. Ima, too, had family there. Mumeh Babel for one. Gradmother Yocheved and Alteh's sister. It was said about her that she was a beauty when young. Certainly her eyes were a very deep blue and her complexion, even in old age, still peaches-and-cream. She was married to uncle Mendel who was a remarkable character: he was said to be a fornicator, a collaborator with the British police and generally a shady character. He had an enormous belly. After he gave Babel 3 children they ceased to live together, but he came back to die in her house after 40, 50 years? She certainly had an unhappy married life. Her only comfort was her 'housekeeping'. The three sisters, Babel, Mumeh Rachel and Alteh, were the three cleanest women I have ever met, spotless would be the wrong word, their obsession with cleanliness bordering on neuroses. If we ever visited Aunt Rachel in Petah-Tikvah (which was very rare because of the risk of treading on her frequently washed floors) we felt so uncomfortable that Mummy hardly ever took us there, preferring us to 'rough it' with the numerous by happy-go-lucky family of Aunt Sarah (Aba's sister) and her children. It was said about Aunt Rachel that she took beautifully laundered and starched shirts out of her husband's cupboard, reboiled and relaundered them, and put them away again. There were mirrors on her sofa handles § (or perhaps you could just mirror yourself in them they were so highly polished). On those rare occasions of our visits we were kept in the basement kitchen, never allowed to visit the kitchen or salon upstairs, let alone the bedrooms. Once Ima took us furtively out of the basement kitchen to show us the inside of the palace through the glass panes, the holy of holies.



Aunt Babel was not quite so mad about cleanliness, though beautifully clean, and what I liked about her house in Mea Shearim was the rather tasteful Victoriana with which (through her husband's influence, for he was a fraternizer with the British) she surrounded herself. There were two enormous portraits of King George V and Queen May, innumerable daguerrotypes of Allenby and his entry into Jerusalem, vying for space with the endless framed tapestries and other embroidered pictures all exquisitely executed by Ima's cousin Rachel whom I grew to know and like very much. Incidentally Babel must have surely had the first gas hot water heater in Mea Shearim, let alone the first refrigerator.

Cousin Rachel, her only daughter, had a tragic and fairly short life (dying in her middle fifties). She was brought up in the Rothschild School and very soon she left to train as a nurse in Berlin. Her fiance died in a road accident, and later on the man she married also died. She came back to Palestine just before Hitler. Aunt Babel had for years prayed and lamented: "Oh, for my daughter to return home safely, oh for my darling only daughter to be home again". But the curious thing was that when Rachel did return, those two were at each other's throats constantly, rowing and bickering. Rachel eventually married a kind elderly man in Jerusalem, but was not to have a long happy life with him, for she died soon after. I wonder if it was cancer. Most probably.

Saba's brother, Uncle Haim also lived in Mea Shearim. (Saba had 'bettered' his lot and went up in the world when he left Mea Shearim for Zichron Moshe). Uncle Haim had a small, pear-shaped, kindly wife Mameh Gittel, who always gave us krovieh, a kind of shortbread, the memory of which makes my mouth water still. They had only two sons, but my goodness, those sons had at least 8 or nine children each. One of the grandchildren now shares half a house with Alteh (Alteh having converted her flat and gone into the smaller half when her children all fled the nest). There seems to be hell going on there daily. Israel, her husband's grandnephew with a large brood cannot be evicted. Alteh curses him loudly every two minutes during the day, and it's all very merry. Knowing Alteh, I'm quite sure most of her stories about them are invented. Nevertheless every time we visit her we have to listen to her tale of woe.

There was one particular narrow alley in Mea Shearim which displayed the most appetizing foodstuffs, little of which, alas, was I allowed to eat. Such delicious fare as pickled our soused herrings, lakerda, pickled cucumbers, bakalah fish, pickled peppers all tempted us. But all we were allowed to buy, delicious enough though it was was kashkavali cheese, halva, and black and green olives.

Tsipeh's daughter

When my cousin ~~Abba~~<sup>Nehama</sup> married, her husband of a few hours - whom she hardly knew - pounced on her on the first night. The incident was so traumatic that the marriage was never consummated. She returned to her mum the following day and divorce proceedings were soon under way. Apparently divorce was very easy to obtain in such a case. She soon married again and has a large family.

Two of Tsipeh's daughters visited me in England, Ahuva and Miriam. Miriam is a real beauty and I visited her in Jerusalem where she lives with a charming and interesting husband who is the Official Receiver for unclaimed property - whatever it means - and four lovely daughters. Although she shaves her hair and wears a wig, it is almost impossible to tell that she does, and her clothes are the latest cry.

I think I would get tired going into the second-cousin branches of both Aba's and Ima's family, but a very important and even to me a 'unique' bunch of people were the Ben-Gershon-Valanskys. They eschewed Valensky, or Vilensky or Wolansky or Valansky) and since Gershon was the head of the family they are all Ben-Gershon now. Gershon was Grandfather Yacob's brother (Aba's father) and Mummeh Kunieh his wife was Grandmother Haye Esther's sister! A double wedding! Fetter Gershon survived quite late. Last time I visited home I surprised my second cousin Herzl (his son) by reminding him that I saw Gershon his father, on several occasions, mixing methylated spirits with water and drinking it! Fetter did drink, but could not have possibly noticed that I noticed or indeed that I knew what all that spirit was, but I was very observant. Mummeh Kunieh, a good business-woman, was not a good housewife. They lived beneath the Synagogue in Zichrom Moshe where they ran the grocery shop which soon prospered into several branches. One I surprised my aunt Kunieh holding her long skirt up over the drains and pissing like a man! She wore no knickers!

Sometimes their son Michael, my second cousin, would sometimes show me his stamp-collection, with commentaries on countries I hardly ever knew. He manoeuvred me to stand in such a position and bend over the catalogue so that he could caress my bare legs. I didn't mind at all. Later Michael proved to be one of the kindest people on earth. He spent days on end sitting with my sick brother Yacob in his last days in hospital.

Above, the synagogue itself was a happy place and especially on days of joy, weddings etc. the blind band from 'Hinuck Ivrim'(Institute for the Blind) would perform on their wind instruments in the rostrum. I loved listening, but especially staring into the eyes of the blind to examine closely the grey film over their unseeing eyes. They were not unhappy, and they spoke a pure Hebrew (Ivrit Tsahah) whether they were originally Yiddish or Ladino-speaking.

## V - Schools and holidays

School was not a particularly happy place for me. My first school was the Lemel School (The Count from the House of Lemel - a Jewish benefactor?). I had to walk for ten minutes uphill and had no major roads to cross. Later on the first cinema was built opposite the Lem school, the Eddison cinema, but I was ill with the usual flu and sore throat and was unable to see the first neon lights in full blaze - an event for which we had been prepared for months. I was bright and uninhibited in my first year at the Lemel; I remember one incident well: the day we were playing 'doctors' during break and I rather think we stripped to our vests and pants and - horror of horrors drank unboiled water from the 'tanaja' (earthenware container). The fuss that was made, especially by Ima who ran to school and created a mini row. Why are not the children supervised, did the teacher know, were they aware of the terrible danger of God Forbid typhus etc.? and so on and so on. Typhus had indeed claimed a victim or two, and two other girls escaped because after a few months they appeared pale, emaciated and with all their hair completely shaven. No doubt Ima knew what she was up to.

Ima then made a move and took me out of the Lem school and registered me at the Alliance Israelite Universell - a step for which I bless her to this day. The Alliance was a much less pampered, more overcrowded school. However, the Alliance taught languages. Right at the beginning I was made to copy the date from the blackboard - 28 September 1927. I started copying from right to left, naturally, and the teacher, Mme Judex caught me half way and fetched me a 'gifle' about which I told Ima. She came running to school in the afternoon and told Mme Judex: "If you as much as lay a finger on my daughter, I shall beat the life out of you." This must have got to the staff-room because I was never beaten again. It shows you could get places with a bit of 'hutzpah'.

Aliza joined the Alliance when she was five. First children, I think, do not have many hangups about sibling jealousy and since I don't remember ever being jealous of Yacov I was well set up not to be jealous of Aliza. But I remember that only once when my girl-friends came crowding round me saying: where did you get this lovely sister of yours, where have you been hiding her? etc. etc., I distinctly felt jealous.

I had no interest in a number of subjects: arithmetic was utterly boring and later on algebra and geometry became completely incomprehensible, as were chemistry and physics. But I loved languages: French and Hebrew being taught side by side was a great advantage. We didn't seem to suffer.

An accusation usually levelled at this sort of tuition is that you are ~~master~~<sup>jack</sup> of all trades and master of none. I'm not sure. Periodically, I believe, my Hebrew suffered, and vice versa, but I certainly have no cause to complain. We had, as in a lot of schools, a few dedicated teachers and quite a lot of skivers. Our French and English teachers - we took up English at the age of 11 - were first rate.

I remember once when we played 'doctors and patients' (what else?) pushing bits of twig in each other's anus (to pretend they were thermometers); This, although we were caught in the act, was intelligently passed over since it did not involve 'hygiene' - unlike the drinking of the brackish water incident.

But I ought to go back to the Lemel: soon after the 'gan' I went to school at the Lemel for a year only. The reason given me for the transfer of schools was that it was too 'free', that we didn't do enough learning, there was not enough discipline and that Ima wanted me to know 'languages'. It was explained that there were too many outings, such as visits to woods in Talpioth, as though every week was Rosh Hashana Lailanot, Tu Bishvat, the Trees' New Year, when we all went planting saplings in the wood, carrying banners and singing marching songs. I suspect, however, that the real reason (though the desire for languages was genuine) was that the fees were getting too steep and at the Alliance the school fees were only a third. At the Lemel we had bushy-eyebrowed, thick-voiced Mr. Tamir (a Russian trained pedagogue. I didn't know it at the time, since I only acquired the yardstick later when I was able to compare Alliance with Lemel that discipline in the Lemel was non-existent and we were obviously encouraged to feel free and uninhibited, so that we spoke out of turn, we called the teacher 'ata' (tu) and were allowed to approach the desk without permission. Adon Tamir loved telling us Bible stories which we actually understood. Later in the Alliance the Bible - as related by Adon Isbi - was a jumble of war manoeuvres, strategies, revenge by God on his whoring favourite nation and dynasties, much too strong meant for me and - on the whole - lustreless.

The other teacher I remember well, though I was too young to go to her workshop - was Kveret Katarboursky, also Russian-trained, who taught needlework. We were not shooed away from her workshop and were allowed to admire the beautiful embroidery and weaving work which she had on display in her cool, long airy balcony. She had a sister who sometimes came as her locum, equally kind, and although you could tell one from the other, I got terribly mixed up.

Children are not snobs and don't distinguish colour of skin. It was Ima who did not encourage me to play with the Ladino-speaking girls who had dark skins. When I was adolescent, I was furious with her about this. I not only liked the Ladino-speaking girls but preferred them to the 2-3 ashkenaziot, spoilt and snooty girls that they were. I am quite certain that had there not been so many enemies outside Israel, we would soon have a racial war within our boundaries.

Bathsheva Mizrahi's family came from Aggam; her father was a 'sabal' (porter) and they were a large, dark-skinned family. Batsheva was intelligent and first drew on the blackboard in chalk the penis penetrating the woman's vagina. It was entitled "The king entering the gates of mercy" (hamelech nikhness beshaarei Zedek". I still had no real grasp of what it was all about, though I knew it was meant to be terribly rude. Batsheva's family only ate one meal a day I gathered, at night, squatting round one large paella filled with delicious food like aubergine done in concentrated tomato sauce with onions, peppers, ladies fingers and freshly shelled peas. They had no cutlery and ate with their fingers. Batsheva later became ashamed of this habit and 'bettered' herself. I believe she ended teaching. Batsheva much later told me of the custom of their families displaying the bloodied sheet after nuptials to the accompaniment of "lu,lu,lu" the Arab chant sung by women at joyful events.

Marie Tawil became a good friend. We both had the same birth month, December. She was the 12th and I was born on the 13th. I asked Ima to make quite sure about my birthday. Birthdays were only remembered according to the Jewish calendar and we were growing up amidst French and English cultural traditions at school and it became quite important for me to know the exact day of my birth in anno domini. Aba went to the Birth Registry for me and established that my correct date was indeed the 13th of December. Marie Tawil's father, mother, grandmother (who wielded extraordinary power and smoked a pipe every evening in the porch) and about 6-7 siblings all lived in a one-room apartment in Ahva. Her mother was under the mother-in-law's domination, it was quite obvious even to a young child like me. It seems there was hardly any money, Mr. Tawil being half-blind and workless. Marie suffered from 'petit-mal'. I was quite disconcerted when it first happened - I had no idea she had it. In the middle of a sentence she went off in a trance, with her eyes showing nothing but the whites. She came back to earth - nearly always with an apologetic smile, but no apology - and continued either to listen or to talk. She had a beautiful hand. (We had calligraphy lessons but it availed me nothing. My children still complain that I write abominably).

I think Marie's petit-mal improved through sheer determination but also because she acquired the right employers, orthodox shoe-vendors. Her mother used to make kous-kous for their one evening meal. (I think they had coffee, black of course, and pittah for breakfast, and pittah, cheese and tomatoes for lunch, but the evening meal needed long preparation and always consisted of enviable food, looking like tagliatelli, and sometimes stuffed courgettes. Our diet consisted of cream-cheese, eggs, bread and butter and cocoa for breakfast, overcooked chicken or meat balls with equally overcooked potatoes for lunch, followed by compote (this was nice, consisting of stewed quince, prunes and askidinia, deliciously-flavoured, rather like strawberries - all swimming in its own juice). Supper, apart from Friday nights, was always cold and we had bread-butter and cheese, or halva, or olives, or salad, followed by the ubiquitous cocoa. I always had a kind of nostalgie-de-la-boue for the Sephardi way of life. Ima would say I didn't know which way my bread was buttered. I absolutely disagree.

Mazal Mizrachi and I became good friends. She was not terribly bright but she had the power to act and her mimicry was my envy. She and I acted plays together and because she had a slight limp she looked very funny when she was meant to act the part of a boy running away from his mother who was about to spank him. She often stayed for a supper of bread and halva or bread and olives (always refusing butter - later on we realized why Sephardis and Yemenites hardly ever have heart complaints: they ate their food unsaturated by animal fats). When I visited her home, again the one-room apartment, I was always struck by the 'lit-matrimonial' which took pride of place. I suspect all the little ones slept in it too. It had to be reached by a small pair of wooden steps. Her mother was simply enormous, and her father a thin, small cobbler.

One day the devil possessed me in the classroom and I untied one of her plaits (right) and one of mine (left) and plaited them together into one thick one. And as luck would have it she was called to the blackboard... I don't remember the exact kind of punishment we both got.

My friend Tikvah Shitreet (the daughter of Judge Shitreet) was fated to die. I believe there is an Arab saying to the effect that every bullet bears the name of a victim on it: Tikvah married young, barely out of school, her husband was a young policeman. When the husband got back unexpectedly one day and found Tikvah with a boy friend in bed, he shot the man, Tikva and himself. The men both died but Tikvah survived! Nevertheless a few years

later, during a curfew imposed by the British following a pogrom, or what the British called 'disturbances', Tikva broke the rule and went out of her house to cross the street. The bullet, obviously bearing her name this time, caught her and she died. It was a curious custom of the High Commissioner to have his 'regrets about the disturbances' announced on the radio. The announcement started 'Hanatsiv Haelion Mitstaer lehodia'. The High Commissioner regrets to announce. Then followed the details of the bloodshed. During one curfew, when I was an early teenager, I broke the rule and ran from our house to Doda Shoshana's house, a good 1½ minutes away, and felt so proud that I wasn't caught or hit. The regulations were strict and many daring people died.

The headmistress of the Alliance was Mrs. Cahanov, while Mr. Cahanov was headmaster of the boys' school. Later on Isaac Cahanov was ~~my~~ my first beau, but more anon. Shiffra (Suzanne) was in my class and a very reticent, nervous little creature she was too. Quite obviously dominated by powerful Mrs. Cahanov, as were her husband and one of the boys. The first, Jacques, escaped his mother early but was to die in the War of Liberation.

Mrs. Cahanov's house was, to my mind then, the most beautiful house I have ever visited. It occupied the whole story of a house (which would normally be divided into two or three flats). It was beautifully furnished. I remember it vividly, the exact number of rooms, the furnishing, upholstery, embroidery, applique work in every room. The impression was of a cool, dark red-plush mansion, silky and Persian-carpeted. How did she manage it, when the average Israeli house is starkly Scandinavian-style furnished, harsh and hygienic looking? This was obviously French provincial taste, with many French provincial beautiful dark mahogany pieces. The kitchen, ~~by contrast~~, all blue-and-white delft, was refreshingly contrasting to the rest of the sumptuous house. Mrs. Cahanov was a humble Safad girl who was sent to France quite early and must have acquired her French cultural tastes which became second nature to her. I hardly ever heard her speaking Hebrew, which she must have spoken very well, being a Safad girl.

Margalin Cohen told me the facts of life. Margalit (Marguerite) was my friend, her sister Freha had a li 'r' and she was my aunt Aliza's friend. So we were together quite a lot. Margalit and I were taking a stroll in Horshat Schneller (Schneller wood) one <sup>hot</sup> Saturday afternoon. We were sitting on the grass eating blades, when she said to me, not at all excited and in a whisper: "Look over there, that couple is making a baby". I was dumfounded, curious and excited. "What do you mean?" "Look at those two people over there", she

continued, "they-are-making-a-baby" and then she explained to me what they were doing: The King Entering the Gates of Mercy stuff. I pumped her for more details, forgetting to look at the couple from time to time, by then an entwined tangle of black and white (black skirts, black shorts, white blouses and white shirts were worn a lot then). She had to do her best to explain, not a very satisfactory best, because she hardly knew at the time. I was twelve.

On one occasion I happened to look out of the loo window<sup>n</sup> in the Abrahams house - you could see right into the flat downstairs. There was a naked couple on the floor, facing each other and in the various process of changing positions. I quickly ran to summon my friend Hanna Schlank and we ran back to that window like creatures possesses. The couple were still at it and Hanna and I stupidly giggled. The couple heard us and promptly moved away scowling. We felt vaguely ashamed, but not for long, curiously enough, because once when I met the women - both she and her husband were married respectably and were having a Saturday afternoon legitimate dally - it was she who turned away in embarrassment.

Hava (Eva) Angel and her sister Stella were friends too, Stella was my sister's Aliza's friend. I forget her brother's name but I had a faint crush on him, chiefly I think because he knew maths so well! They spoke French at home and the mother always helped the children academically, while degutting fish and peeling potatoes or nursing the youngest cripple (who didn't survive). The female cripple was born with the limbs facing sideways - a terrible sight to behold.

Especially during the 'romantic' period of my life (at the age of 15 and 14) did we all enjoy singing nostalgically about "guitare d'amour", "le plus beau dans tous les tangos du monde" "c'etait un musicien qui jouait dans un boite de nuit", a hotch potch of nostalgic French cabaret, mingled with Hebrew patriotic marching and prisoner songs. Ima bought me a beautiful mandoline in the Old City which I had for years and later took with me to England. My mandoline teacher, an impecunious studnet, was not very inspiring and I soon gave up lessons (unlearning all the music I could read). There is no doubt I preferred to play by ear. Quite a lot of the girls at school played the mandoline. Before I got<sup>to</sup> the self-conscious age I even played at a concert once but I never really became efficient enough to perform in public and I remain to this day very much a private performer, unlike my gifted sons. Occasionally, when the children hide my mistakes - I quite enjoy playing but there is no doubt that my days as a musician are over and I am getting rusty.



As I got more accustomed to being in the Alliance and mastering French, I came to love French culture and French as a language. I soon discovered my facility with languages, especially spoken ability (though in fact I am what must be called a born speller, for I make very few spelling mistakes in any of my three languages. When it comes to Yiddish, I suppose I could master that if I wanted to but I was never attracted to all the double alefs and vavs and ayins which proliferate in it).

The school curriculum was divided neatly in two halves, we did some subjects in Hebrew and some in French. Thus we had Tanach and Jewish history and language in Hebrew, but also - I suspect because we had a specialized chemist - we had chemistry in Hebrew (an awful subject, as was the teacher, Mr. Hefetz, who had terribly bad breath, spat when he spoke and eventually had a mental breakdown and was called away from school, after my time, alas). French History and language physics and maths were taught in French. I abhorred maths - I was filled with r panic at the start of every lesson.

Quite a number of the French teachers were local girls sent to training colleges in France run by the Alliance and financed by a Baron Rothschild foundation. So even during our school days we remembered young teachers who had been sent to France for three years and who came back fully qualified, Mlle Trigoda for instance. When they got back they spoke Hebrew with a charming French accent.

It seems odd to me now that in an age of almost total nationalism and chauvinism, when Hebrew was flaunted in the streets (down with Yiddish, the galluth language, down with Ladino, Ivrit for ever!) there were still a few pockets of resistance, schools like the Alliance Israelite Universelle, the Evelina de Rothschild (headed by Miss Landau, a refined Jewish lady more English than the English High Commissioner) I am eternally grateful to Ima who made the crucial move taking us out of a purely Hebrew environment and allowing us to absorb French and English cultures. Nevertheless we found ourselves in an ambivalent position with the girls who remained in the Lemel School and who joined forces in our last two years at the Alliance doing what was known as the "Course Mishari - (Commerical course): we spoke French and English, it's true, but their Hebrew was polished.

Quite early on I made friends with Marcelle Cabasso and her entourage. Marcella was the strongest girl ever - surely she should have ended as one of those athletes whose sex is nowadays disputed. She used to lift me by the elbows, circling me round the school yard, bouncing me rhythmically, chanting: "Ale-dandrie, c'est ma patrie!" Marcelle was welcome in our house, unlike poor Mazal Mizrahi. (Perhaps Marcella was welcome because she came from Alexandria, where Ima spent her adolescent years, who knows?). In addition to 'Ale-xandrie, c'est ma patrie' Marcella bounced me to "Viva la Bandera Tricolora!" and she used to whizz me round in a one-step to the tune of "Valencia, la la la" (because of my name).

Later I made friends with Haya Akinin, and of course Marie Tawil and Mazal Mizrahi still remained friends. For some odd reason, or perhaps not so odd because she was so knowing about housekeeping and middle-age worries, Marie Tawil was greatly liked by Ima, slightly to my envy. Since Marie suffered from 'petit mal', I grew to know when not to speak to her or to swivel her round if she was in the middle of a traffic jam in the school playground: she had many trusted friends who took care of her during her attacks, and she came to no harm at all. Now that she has a family, I believe she is almost toally cured. Haya Akinin (Vida at home) was Mr. Akinin's niece. Notice how by just taking the 'n' off at the end, he could get away with a Hebrew-sounding name. Like Madame Cahanov who was terribly hard on her daughter Suzanne, Mr. Akinin equally victimized Haya. I well remember the tears those two girls were in at school, and how happy we felt that none of the teachers were our relations.

But my two best friends were Mazal Panika and Tzipora Recanati. Mazal Panika (Mazaltov Panikashvili to give her her full name) emigrated from Russia, via Istanbul, and at first she could only speak Georgian (Gurtzit) and Turkish. She had a first class mind. Small, rather 'courbée', i.e. her mother couldn't have gone on and on and on at her as Ima did to hold myself straight, with enormous brown eyes, and an equally large nose, picked up French, English and Hebrew in no time at all. In addition she was always first in Maths and Physics! Oddly enough she was far from being a snob, in fact rather humble with it, and so had many friends and admirers. Tzipora, tall, straight, with a very bad complexion and equally bad nose, had extraordinary dignity, many admirers and worshippers and an aristocratic air. The rest of the 45, 39, 34 pupils (they dropped out as they grew to be 12, 13 and 14, to go and earn a living - no compulsory education - and who is it said all Jews were rich, my goodness there was poverty in the circles where I moved which I have yet to see in England!) were 'also rans'. Mazal came first in class, Tzipora second and I third. Once I came second, but only once, and I still have the prize given me then. It is 'Voyages aux pays mystérieux', about Tibetan explorations and encounters. Oddly enough there was no jealousy when the 'trio' were together, but later on Tzipora began to be courted by Suzanne Cahanov, and I felt distinctly jealous. When Suzanne was cultivated by Mazal later on, Tzipora felt jealous, and so on and so on. The three of us gave ourselves strange names: I was Adeline, Mazal became Marceline, and Tzipora became Zozotte. We wrote triangular love letters which <sup>we</sup>would put in the other two's desks early in the morning as 'surprises'. Suzanne Cahanov, flat-nosed and boy-bodied, straight haired and uncoordinated in her movements boasted the first bicycle at school.

Mile Riva (Rivka) Saltz then came into our lives and our schooldays assumed a new meaning - that is French became alive and beautiful! She was absolutely wonderful and we worshipped her. I may have had a crush on her, but I don't think so. I was too busy having crushes on boys at the age of 13. But I know that half the class-pupils were in love with her. I am sure she had more presents in the shape of little bunches of flowers, handkerchieves etc. than the Queen of England. She was young, only 23 to our 13, and would tomboy with us in the playground like a young kitten. In fact she had more agility and verve than some of the dumpy fat girls in the classrooms. She was a great enthusiast and made French literature come alive to us. But not in a soft, namby pamby way because she was a bit of a slave driver and made us work hard but we loved it. I still have not discovered her mystery. On top of all that she was most attractive, tall, slim, with a beautiful face, a most engaging smile, beautiful teeth and just about the right kind of make-up for school, and of course clothes (fashionable but not too ostentatious) became her like a model. She never could have children, and later on when I was having a demi-vierge love affair with her ex-husband Maurice Stolliair, he said that as a young teacher in Casablanca she had had an abortion and it messed her up for life. I remember that although I thought of myself as a sophisticated 15 year old who knew all about life and was flirting violently, almost sleeping, with a mature man, I was utterly astounded at Riva's past. Riva later married Stoyanovsky and became (and still is I think - although long past retiring age, but her energy is boundless) the Headmistress of the Alliance Israelite, Mme Cahanov being dead. Riva had another sister, equally brilliant, how come two such stars in one humble Safad family - I believe her parents were poor shopkeepers - Miriam who married Mendelow, the Professor of English at the Hebrew University. An incredible couple of sisters, the long and the short, Miriam was tiny. Miriam taught me for a little while in the 'Course' when our teacher was absent on sick-leave. Some of the boys in my class, lazy dogs, were over 6 feet and strong with it: they quavered while she stood on tiptoe to smack their faces for some legitimate excuse or other. An observer would have said that it would have been so simple for one of the big louts to lift her up (all 6 stone) and shake the life out of her. But such behaviour never happened.

I mentstrusted when I was 12½, during the summer holidays. I knew vaguely about the facts of life but I was a late developer, or rather late by Middle-Eastern standards but probably not so by Western ones. Sexual urges began in earnest between 13 and 14. I was horrified at the show of blood, not being prepared for it. I ran in panic from the lavatory (we were living then in the 1st flat of the Abrahms house (later on we moved in the 2nd flat on the same floor). The 2nd flat was a larger, roomier flat because, Ina said, the girls were growing up and soon there will be matchmaking and prospective bridegrooms to choose from and we must have a proper salon for them!

Across the 'mirpesset' I ran to the kitchen and said, howling Ima Ima yored li dam mehatusik (blood is coming out of my bottom.) Ima fetched me a mighty smack on my face - the first one in her life. I was utterly shocked. I was told later that that was the superstitious habit, probably to shock the young girl in order to divert her from the shock of the menstruation. Anyway, I burst into tears and she cuddled me and said Mazal Tov, Mazal Tov. She then ran round looking for rags. She herself, poor thing, never afforded sanitary towels, but only clean rags. Later I was to be treated to a dozen washable sanitary towels, and she sewed me a special bag with my initials Y.V. Od Vav. My periods always (until I gave birth for the first time) gave me hell. First, they were very irregular taking five, six or seven weeks, and sometimes 8 weeks to come round. Later on when I started petting with boys I lived in fear of pregnancy.

Once the school took a trip to the Dead Sea and I was in the middle of the 'curse'. But of course we had to paddle in the Dead Sea and I lifted my frock and tucked <sup>it</sup> into my knickers, forgetting about my period - always rather heavy. This time blood showed through my pants. The shame and horror that assailed me when some busy-body girls drew my attention to it. The class was still divided into two camps: those who 'had it' and those 'who had not yet started it'. A curiously ambivalent feeling prevailed. Of course those who had it were proud, yet felt guilty about discussing it with those still awaiting menarche.

Madame Stollari, Riva, who I think by then had separated from her husband Maurice (who later became my first real flame) had taken up with Adon Stoianovsky, a lawyer, and continued to teach us for one more year, before I moved to the 'course' (the Commercial Course). Our last 8th year at school was earnest, and we worked hard (for the first time in my life in my case) revising for the 'Certificat d'Etudes Primaires'. Without much effort, I had till then continued to absorb knowledge. In subjects I was interested in, that is. But for the Certificat I had to revise all subjects, especially cursed maths. The great day arrived. We trooped down to the Old City where we sat, in an enormous hall, at individual tables and chairs and where M. Couve-de-Murville came in at the end of every session to announce: "Enco-o-ore cinq minutes," and then "Enco-o-ore deux minutes". I had got quite a lot done in composition, dictee, histoire, but the accursed maths saw a blank page at the "Encore deux minutes" stage, and blank it remained. The orals were less daunting, because I was reassured by the kindly Fathers, or were they Brothers who each sat in a cubicle. The results were announced a few days later. The agony I felt while waiting for my name to be called (or not as the case may be) can only be imagined. Since it began with V, I was among the three last called. But called I was! I had passed! Joy of joys!

I loved Victor Hugo, Anatole France, Emile Zola, the poet Lamartine. I also read Paul and Victor Marguerite, and French translations of D'Annunzio (The heart, at which I shed tears). My English was improving by leaps and bounds and I became quite fluent. I enjoyed speaking it with the correct pronunciation, which meant that I had to 'roll' my Palestinian 'R's which otherwise served very well for French. When I am very tired, I find myself slipping back into 'Penglish', relaxing my 'R's.

I seem to have read whatever came to hand in English and French, and soon I joined the public Library (for I was 13!) and a new world came to be opened to me! The Library itself was a secretive place, and the books did not look at all prepossessing, because they were uniformly covered in a buff binding for protection so the place looked curiously military and unexciting. Excitement was to come when I got home and opened David Copperfield or the Tale of Two Cities. But I also read avidly in Hebrew, especially Shalom Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Sfarim and even Shalom Ash. Bialik who was still alive in Tel Aviv at the time curiously did not engage me, although hailed as the greatest Hebrew poet. This was really curious because one or two verses and love songs of his which were set to music I still enjoy playing on my mandoline. "Shalom Rav Shuvech Tzipora nechmedeth", but especially "Lo bayom velo balayla, heresh etzeh li hataila". Surely it wasn't only the melodies I enjoyed?

My mandoline gave me a lot of pleasure. I only had a few lessons before getting bored with them and with the teacher - a most uninspired young student who taught to make/<sup>an</sup>extra living - hence the uninspired teaching. Ima who had a lovely contralto would, if she was in the mood, also take up the mandoline on a summer afternoon when she was 'through' with her chores and played well, or sometimes I played and she would sing. She even learnt to sing some of the French romantic tangos which we sang at school. (I still play them on my mandoline). "Le plus beau des tous les tangos du monde" "Guitar d'amour, apporte moi le son des beaux jours", "Chante, chante ma guitar, chante chante au clair de lune", "C'etait un musicien qui jouait dans un boite de nuit"... Ima mimicked the French perfectly - she was gifted for languages and still speaks German and English (apart from Hebrew and Yiddish, Arabic) perfectly well.

This was a good period in my life, a woman and not quite a woman. Getting on with Ima better than ever before and doing quite well at school. Full of romantic ideas about love, and vague yearnings - which were to become not so vague within a year) about sex. My Mother had quietened down from child-rearing (Aliza was nearly nine and much less trouble) and Aba scraping a tolerable living before the general bad economic situation which was soon to assail us and the disastrous days of 1936 when vague rumours reached us about some awful places called concentration camps in Germany but which nobody yet wanted to believe.

After finishing the 8th and final form, there were great debates at home as to what I was to do. My own inclination, now that I could speak English fluently and have begun to cultivate a love of English literature and culture, was to go to the College (HaCollege Haangli), the only English College which would have given me an English-style, as opposed to a French style, education. But Aba's financial affairs were in deteriorating condition and tuition fees, chicken feed as they appear now, were just not available. (Much later on, both Aliza and I were harbouring some resentment at all this withholding of education from us, saying to my poor old widowed Ima that had she gone out to work, or indeed, had she taken over Aba's shop, she could have sent us to the College to be properly educated instead of to - as was to happen - the two-year Alliance Commercial Course, where, along with some sort of attempt to continue our general French education, we were taught shorthand, how to type and how to balance sheets - a feat I had never mastered. How cruel children can be to parents who at the time believe they are doing whatever they are doing for the good of the child. I suppose the idea of going out to work never entered my Ima's mind, nobody of her age did, unless they had a vocation. To neglect giving us hot lunches and being at home when we got back from school was, to poor Ima's eyes, <sup>a</sup>worse crime than to earn tuition fees.

So began my two year "Course Mishari". I was very fortunate because both Zipora Recanati and Mazal Panica and Haya Akinin and Suzanne Cahanov came along too! So the threesome continued. And of course now we were 'mixed' with boys who joined us from the corresponding 8th in the boys' Alliance. Since my adult sexuality began in full force and the falling-in-loves began in earnest, it is curious that I cannot now remember the 'objects' of my love, except for the two very important people who still stand out, Maurice Stolliar and Isaac Cahanov, both my teachers. Why didn't I ever 'fall' for the boys in my class? Maybe because they were most unattractive, maybe because of propinquity, or maybe that it is always more exciting to fall in love with somebody much older - a kind of father figure?

I suppose I fell in love in earnest with my teacher, Monsieur Maurice Stolliar who would now be known as somebody who has 'taken advantage of me'. I didn't realize it at the time, but obviously he would have been sacked in the climate of opinion that prevailed about pupil-teacher relationship at the time. I believe now, and I think it right, nothing dramatic is done to a teacher provided the girl is of a certain age and willing. What sort of certain age? I was fourteen, totally absorbed by a healthy sexual appetite, and utterly loving every moment of our being together. But I was a demi-vierge for a long time because there was a certain taboo about defloration which we both instinctively honoured. I would go to his flat and we were naked and in bed together for hours, but to me it seemed too short. (To Ima I would tell lies about going to see Zipora or Mazal Panica).

But a curious thing happened. I suppose I was just insatiably in need of sexual cuddling and kissing, because two months later I took a fancy to another teacher (while still not going off Maurice). Monsieur Isaac Cahanov (the son of the headmaster and the brother of my friend Suzanne). He had a car and we used to go for drives outside town. He was a delicate, gentle person, and I soon took great pleasure in comparing the two Messieurs' performances. One day I told the original Monsieur Maurice about his competitor. He was quite annoyed, but he laughed like a drain and I didn't know what to make of it. I was both pleased and hurt.

There were a number of boys in the class who were interested in me - very few in whom I was interested. None, in fact, though I quite liked one or two. I suppose having tasted more mature joys in the guise of experienced men, I didn't care for the fumbling attempts of youth. Once, however, I got thoroughly frightened. Isaac Levi, a boy who was in love with me and also the son of Adon Levi the strict teacher in the Boys' Elementary Alliance, once said to Mazal Panica, (and of course it came back to me: "If Yocheved's father knew what she was up to with the teachers, he'd kill her" (It's debateable whether Aba would have lifted more than one angry stucco shout at me and then slunk off in his corner). But nevertheless guilt began gnawing. I felt guilty because I was doing 'naughty things', because I was playing up one man against another, and because I was lying to Ima. But I couldn't stop and continued to long for their sundry invitations, which came frequently, and the outings themselves.

At the same time I continued to absorb all the facts and skills that were distributed at school - except for book-keeping which I abhorred. A fat lisping English lady taught us shorthand and typing. I think her name was Miss or Mrs. Bamberger. She had several husbands in succession - oddly enough divorce was not frowned upon. One of her husbands, so the tale goes, used to tie a red ribbon round his penis and would stroll naked round the room. Another husband got the complaint: "He messes me about and never even says thank you". She must have been disturbed, or undersexed, or had made the wrong choice always. Poor woman. Unfortunately we had a very strict teacher for bookkeeping and I dreaded him. He was a tyrant who would pounce on unsuspecting ones (me) and tear them to shreds. But I took nothing, but nothing, in, <sup>about double-entries</sup> although I became quite proficient in shorthand and typewriting. We studied the typewriter in a room upstairs where we had a gramophone record. It played a kind of walse and at the end of the phrase there was a man's voice announcing 'Carriage - return'. We had to do all our 'Cat sat mat' stuff in unison to the music. Quite great fun.

All the <sup>whole time</sup> while I continued to see my friends Zipora and Mazal, as well as a few newcomers who came to the Course Mishari from the Lemel School. Sima Berkovitz (or Sonia as she was known at home - her parents were Russian) and I became quite friendly. I think she realized she was intruding on the trio and wasn't quite secure. She was the first girl - and I think she truly only meant to be helpful - who told me about the slight growth on my upper lip. I still wonder, had I not tried to mess about with it, first shaving it and then picking at it, if I'd have had any thick growth at all. This I shall never know. I shall no doubt have to continue to do so until I die. But I remember being so depressed about it that I seriously contemplated suicide. I must have been attractive. Certainly boys looked at me in the street, and men turned their heads to stare at me. Also I had the usual accompaniment of wolf whistles, which I soon learnt to ignore, or cope with. But that soft growth on my upper lip plagued me. When Robin was born and when he started recognizing me and smiling to me at a few weeks old - one of the loveliest moments on earth! - I remember thinking 'I wonder if he is put off by his mum's moustache!'

All the while the political events continued uneasy. I belonged to the Hagana where I was a 'messenger', taking messages early in the morning from one man (leader) to another. I never was promoted. Demonstrations continued, along with killings and later on hangings. Hangings of Jewish prisoners too! The rumours of Hitler's concentration camps were sadly being confirmed, and by the time I was to finish the Course Mishari, at the age of 15½, there were no doubts at all about the German atrocities - though of course none in their right mind could fathom the scale of the barbarity. That nobody could believe.

British soldiers, as indeed the British police, were becoming ostracized. Relations became uneasy. We were not encouraged to smile back at British police, who always smiled and tried to 'chat up' Jewish young girls. So that, in fact, the fear and discouragement of the  $\beta$  'goyim' was unselective. Certainly you didn't fraternize with the British, but you now also began to talk about the German swine.

Prives (as in privet) was battered to death during one of the demonstrations near Cinema Eden by a British soldier. We have not lived it down. Menachem Prives was a seminar-friend of my brother Yacov, a quiet boy with slightly stooping shoulders and darting eyes. I believe he was very active in Beigin's part as a 'messenger'. But that evening, when youngsters demonstrated against the sinking of the Struma boat and the diversion of the 'maapilim' or as the British government labelled them 'illegal immigrants' from Hitler's camps, Prives was the victim of an inhuman and brutal assault which filled us all with silent rage and determination to 'win through' and not to give in.



Most of our childhood holidays were spent in Jaffa, and these for health reasons. "Children, breathe the sea air, breathe deeply" is ~~an exhortation~~ exhortation I still remember which Ima repeated endlessly, breathing deeply herself to show a good example. Arrangements were long and exciting and we would set off on a Friday, Aba spending the weekend with us and returning alone at crack of dawn on Sunday to be at the shop at opening time. The journey was long and hazardous. A private taxi was hired for the five of us and the forty odd mile journey must have taken 3-4 hours on badly tarmacked roads, especially round the dangerous "Seven Sisters" series of bends. We counted those. I can still hear the clinking of three mugs, as Ima poured out tea from a thermos and held her hand outside the car. It took a long while <sup>to cool</sup> for the children to drink.

We stayed in a humble kosher pension, and on Friday nights ate at enormously long tables. I was an apathetic eater as a child, but I still remember the taste of the gefilte fish in that 'pension' - most probably because it was heavily peppered (Ima never peppered her gefilte fish for health reasons;) and served with pickled cucumbers and peppers - items which were definitely not encouraged to be eaten at home - for the ubiquitous 'health' reasons. I believe we were even allowed ice-cream, quite taboo otherwise for the hazard of 'tummy aches'. One summer, in that very same pension I developed diarrhoea but did not tell Ima (I knew that if I had she would have lost her head and said 'I told you so, I told you so' and then there would have been a mad rush to find a doctor in Jaffa). I spent a long time in the lavatory - a squat and uncomfortable one for me with the well-deserved tummy ache. And I felt very weak and feeble bending my knees and having no support of a seat. But Ima never discovered and I survived!

We were taken bathing, first changing in a hut. Even Jacob was allowed in the 'ladies' on account of his being a mere child. But the floor was slatted wood with fairly wide gaps for the water to drip through, and there were always little Arab boys - Peeping Toms - silently watching from underneath the slats. How they got there I don't know. From ~~the~~ time to time when the ladies discovered that they were being watched a hell of a row would break out. But those boys always came back again and again.

There was a long rope attached to the hut for non-swimmers - as the majority was. We would hold on to the rope for dear life and duck with the waves. Nobody thought of learning to swim or teaching swimming. The idea was purely and simply an exercise in 'health'.

Once we witnessed an Arab 'fantasia' on the beach: a lot of ululating noise and drinking of "suss", a kind of coca-cola frothy brown drink. But suddenly a camel was produced from nowhere and was slaughtered in full view of onlookers. I remember the faint protests of the camel. Suddenly it lay on the sand with its innards oozing out and the blood sinking fast into the sand.

Aba had several narrow escapes, but the one we all remember is when he was shot coming back from Jaffa (where he had business) An Arab buller killing the other two passengers of the taxi narrowly missed him. He got away with slight grazes in his shoulders. He was not a good patient, but this time Ima nursed him with concern. That was during the start of the 1929 pogrom.

When I was 12 Ima accompanied Saba and Alteh to Vienna. How long for, I can't remember, but it must have been about 2 months. I don't think she particularly enjoyed herself: Saba went because he was suffering from stomach ulcers, and I expect Ima went to be a companion to himself and Sabta. We were allotted to different uncles and aunts: I went to Leah, while Jacob and Aliza went to stay with Aunt Shoshana. With hindsight, I think now that I was slightly neglected, though I didn't mind at all at the time, it was a blessed relief from overattention. Besides I enjoyed the carefree company of Aunt Leah, Mordechai, Ariele and Aliza (the eldest) (Aliza Hagdloa and Aliza Haktana differentiated between my sister and aunt). Once Leah found an awful lot of bedbugs in the mattresses and there was such panic and todo. Another time Mordechai suffered from an ingrowing toenail and he moaned like a baby. I was curiously unaffected by Ima's absence. But on the day of their return, when the taxi drew up outside their door, and Ima tumbled out in tears, kissing and cuddling and crying over her three children, and actually hugging us to her, I really felt good.

VI  
Maturity

I finished the course and was launched on the world: I had to earn my living. But first I badly wanted to be on 'holiday' and not look for a job right away. I was 15½. I had great fun doing nothing, knowing that there would be no more exams and especially no more incomprehensible bookkeeping lessons. I was quite happy doing embroidery, helping with washing and darning and, of course, going out quite a lot, in mixed groups of boys and girls. We went dancing in "Cafe Europa" and Cafe Vienna making one cup of coffee last the whole evening. I loved dancing. Hated it if a Saturday night came round and I was not invited to go dancing. I don't think I missed out a single dance of an evening.

At about that time I joined the Hagana. Nothing spectacular. I was merely a 'messenger'. Because there were not enough telephones, messages had to be urgently conveyed (in cryptic notes, addressed to assumed names in code) whom we knew but whom we addressed by different names. Discipline and secrecy were paramount. There was a man, a friend of the family, whom I knew oh so well who came to address us on one of our functions, 'Peulot'. But he pretended not to know me and dealt with me as severely and impersonally as he dealt with the others.

At that time, too, I joined the young Macabbi where I trained every Tuesday night. I enjoyed it tremendously. I was no games girl, no 'sportait' no fast runner. But the Swedish exercises I really liked and they suited me. No angular, military jerks (like at Hagana peulot) but soft undulating movements, almost like Yoga would be these days. I was quite busy with my social life too. For apart from dancing the Macabi organized exploration trip (long walks, no namby pamby cars) to the Old City, or Bethlehem and other sites. Invariably we would pair off in the evenings. I 'snogged' a lot. I think I liked snogging with almost any boy, though there were quite a few I refused. I liked being kissed and touched and petted. I cannot now remember the number (or come to that the names) of the boys with whom I had dates - they were so many. Curiously I still did not desire proper intercourse. Petting made me blissfully satisfied. I sometimes had to gently fight against too ardent an approach, but I don't remember having to fight seriously or in panic. I was in love with no one and changed partners frequently and happily. "Like changing shirts". What a happy time.

But soon the summer passed and it was time to look for a job. Panic and sinking heart: how to compose letters of application, as the real aim, the apogee, was a job as a shorthand-typist in the British Palestine Government. Girls two or three years my senior who were already established in Government posts were the envy of Ima, and I was exhorted to write 'applicatsias'. None of the government posts came my way, but in the autumn of 1936 I took a job at an Insurance firm called 'Tocatly and Co' at £P 3.- a month! When Yacov and Aliza went back to school, I had to go to earn my living!

Thus started my secretarial life - a life that was to last my all my working life. Work at Tocatly (as indeed at all offices) began at 8 a.m. and broke up for lunch at 1 o'clock. Then at three we were back in the office until 6 p.m. Did I enjoy my work in an office? Yes and no. In the first few weeks I developed excruciating backache for I was not used to a sedentary posture in front of a typewriter for 8 hours a day. I was a prenticwd to Miss Shami for whom I had to copy insurance policies. First I had to fill in the blanks for the sums of money involved. Most boring. Then I had to type hundreds of 'promissory notes' in connection with mortgages - oblongs of thick paper which had eau-de-nil wavy watermarks. I had to fill in dates well into the 1950s and sums of money. All those future dates meant absolutely nothing as I simply could not conceive of life that far ahead. But even when I was promoted to more interesting shorthand-taking and typing of whole policies I cannot say that I really enjoyed the work. I became slightly infatuated with Mr. Abulafia who gave me English dictation with strong French 'r's. But as he took absolutely no notice of me, I soon gave up this pursuit, without curiously enough any heartache. I used to watch the clock for tea-break and then watch in again for lunchtime. Afternoons were a bit easier, since they were shorter. Tocatly himself, the son of humble parents of Georgian origin who lived not far from us, worked himself up in the insurance and mortgage world and became very rich, some say a millionaire. But he was hardly ever in the luxurious office which he had designed for him, and the room was a kind of holy of holies. Once Mr. Tocatly and wife gave a garden party (unheard of in Jersalem). In his private villa with its huge and tended garden in Talpioth we all ate sticky cakes and drank English tea in the afternoon. An obnoxious chap by the name of Rivlin, slobbery with saliva in the corners of his muth, tryed to kiss me and cuddle me and in my attempts to evade him I missed quite a bit of the fun of the garden party. <sup>a mistake appeared on</sup> Once Mr. Tocatly ~~had~~ 50,000 of his small pocket diaries. The name appeared as 'Toctaly & Co.' and they had to be scrubbed. But the girls 'stole' unto themselves a few pocket diaries. Naturally the London firm who printed them made good the damage.

Mr. Tocatly's general Manager was called Mr. Ashkenazi, and he was a real little tyrant who hardly ever smiled. Tocatly and Ashkenazi were married to two sisters, the Cohen sisters. There were more sisters, all very beautiful, all married into the insurance and mortgage business and all doing well. One niece of Tocatly's, Henia Rose, became my friend, and I was soon to discover that the salary I earned in a month was equivalent to her pocket-money then! I wasn't envious in the least. Just perturbed. Another girl, a niece of Ashkenazi,

Geula, a quiet girl, also became my friend and we would go for long walks on Saturdays. Once a week we would go to Cafe Tuv Tamm, where chess was played and were all the tables had chess boards printed on them. The cheesecake that Mr. Tuv Tamm (as we called him) served was out of this world, and we looked forward to our Thursday night luxury. Often serious men, in between serious chess games, tried to chat us up. One elderly man became so attached to me and invited me to serious concerts at the Edison. At first I was suspicious thinking he surely wanted something in return for giving me concerts, but it turned out he only wanted my young company chatting away and giggling, and I didn't mind in the least. It introduced me to Bethoven, Mozart, Hayden and Bach, but not of course to Wagner.

Highlights of our office life consisted in being allowed to man the complicated telephone board, and in the afternoon when most people were about their business, mostly agents touting for insurance clients, the telephonist Moshe allowed me to make random calls to all and sundry, including British soldiers in the Talavera Barracks. Long and involved conversations ensued, and some of the British soldiers would make rendez-vous with Geula and me, which we never kept.

But there was excitement and thrill in it all. Also, being allowed to type our private letters in office time was considered by the smaller fry as 'perks', and I answered some 'fan mail' advertisements and started corresponding with East End girls and kept this correspondnece until I was married. Receiving letters was fun, and I often came home asking 'any letters today'? Our postman, nice Mr. Tenenbaum, a friend of my parents, sometimes delivered my letters to Aba's shop, because it meant quicker deliver. So Aba sometimes came home with a letter which added to the thrill.

Life at Tocaty's became a little more interesting when a Mr. Baker, an architect, came on the scene. He was the company's vetted architect and he would dictate short reports full of specifications and terms like "reinforced concrete, iron girders". At the end of the week he would slip in a L.F.L. note into my hand and say, "Go buy yourself a hat". Since I wore no hats I delighted in this legitimate bakshi. Mr. Baker drank heavily and sitting under his nose, as it were, I caught the whiff of whiskey - a strange and completely new smell to me who was used to no one drinking in my immediate vicinity. The reports chiefly concerned houses being built in such lovely quarters as Talpioth - a beautiful pine-clad quarter on a southern hill of Jerusalem, overlooking Bethlehem. Some of the villas for which Mr. Baker dictated reports have since been pulled down, more's the pity, to make way for ugly concrete blocks of flats. His villas were mainly built of beautiful pink-grey Jerusalem stone.

I don't know whose idea it was. No doubt Ima's: a vacancy occurred in the much-coveted Government, in the Legal Department, for a shorthand-typist, a part-time job to help with some rush of work. What do you think Ima did. ~~She went to Tocatly~~ She made me apply for the job, and I got it! She then went to Tocatly and spun them a cock and bull story about my not feeling well, having too long a day, or whatever, and would they consider employing me for the mornings only until I got better? They somehow agreed, so for a period of about 3 months, I was working mornings at Tocatly and afternoon in Shaar Shchem! I don't know how I survived, I found it really taxing and worrying. All this was for the sake of 'getting me experience' and getting my foot into the government'. But after three months, I returned to the same dreary full-time job at Tocatly's. My experience in the government I always regard as very weird and surrealistic. A lot of Jewish lads and lasses fraternizing and talking English practically the whole day! Working for old English gentlemen in a quiet, unhurried but efficient atmosphere, almost suspended in time. No hustle and bustle like at Tocatly's. An awful lot of 'So sorries' and 'Oh thank you's'. I liked it, I was puzzled by it, and I gained a lot of experience in government ways and means, totally different from the cut-throat world of commercial business. The two Jewish girls who were my superiors at Shaar Shchem were so efficient, it isn't true. Some of them didn't have to re-read their typescripts, and as for their speeds, I'm sure it must have been 200 words a minute in typing. It really stunned me.

But no job came my way in the much coveted government, and when a vacancy occurred at Goiten's (a firm of lawyers composed of Mr. Goiten and Mr. Goldberg) I applied, and got it. I told a white lie. I said I could speak Arabic, whereas my Arabic only consisted of kitchen Arabic, not Nahawi, and on my first day I stumbled over ~~interpreting~~ <sup>interpreting</sup> between an Arab client (Mr. Goiten was much loved by Arab clients. One woman <sup>presented</sup> ~~gave~~ him a shocking pink embroidered silk cushion which Mrs. Goiten offered to me, and I'm afraid that I couldn't stand it and kindly refused it. I don't know what happened to it). But I was kept on because I was really efficient in other aspects of office life, including Hebrew typing.

For some odd reason I took an intense dislike to the poor messenger boy and began to bully him and make him run unnecessary errands, while shouting at him and calling him a 'no gooder'. He poor lad, from a sephardi family, took it all in his stride, presumably thinking that even the secretary had the right of beaurocratic bullying. I shall never know until this day what prompted me to do this. It is true he was dumb and inefficient, but I feel I am always doubly tolerant of people like him as a rule. What on earth seized me?

Anyway, I wasn't to last long at Goiten, because the much-coveted vacancy at the Secretariat of the Government in the King David came to light, and I was actually appointed! Hard to describe my intensely joyful feelings when I heard the news. I was first subjected to such an elementary test as ~~almost to~~ <sup>cause me to</sup> ~~blame~~

I was given a kind of test which said 'delete whichever is inapplicable'  
 Palestine is situated to the north/east/west/south of Egypt, Syria, blah, blah.  
 Also please spell professor or compute or inapplicable or whatever. Since  
 I pride myself on my spelling I had no difficulty there. No difficulty anywhere.  
 What a shameful test! Still, that and the elementary shorthand-typing test  
 got me in and I was on!